

The Beat Within

A Weekly Publication of Writing and Art from the Inside



Volume 9.25



Art By Dat Nguyen

Thinking of all of you reading this ed. note trapped in cages for long or short periods of time, we feel a little guilty writing about the week we at The Beat Within just took off. That's right, a whole week of no workshops, no furious typing and editing of pieces, no letters belatedly answered, no Beats assembled, laid out, printed and bundled for delivery in the Halls. We decided to give ourselves a much-needed breather, and we took it!

Vacations are an interesting subject. So much depends on resources of time and money. We know people who save and save until they have enough to fly to Paris or Rome or London. We know others who head in the other direction — towards Hong Kong and Thailand. But most of the people we know don't have that kind of money (or time), so our vacations tend to be short, concentrated affairs. One person took his family as far away as St. Louis, Missouri. Another got as far as Huntington Lake in the Sierras. But most of us just hung around the Bay Area, where folks from around the world come to spend their vacations!

We didn't do much, but we did see some movies. (And given that our Tenth Editor's Note Writing Contest is on the subject of your favorite movie — and the deadline is fast approaching — we thought we'd talk about the movies we saw.)

We love movies, so we saw about six of them during the week off! But the two we loved the most are "Fahrenheit 9/11" and "Spider Man 2."

"Fahrenheit 9/11" is the latest documentary film by Michael Moore, that unique filmmaker who always stirs up controversy with his films. His first movie, "Roger And Me," was about the greed of General Motors (and, by extension, all corporations) and how money is the only thing of value to these companies. To them, human beings are throwaway commodities. His last movie was "Bowling For Columbine" which explores America's fascination with guns — and its well-deserved reputation as the most gun-violent country on earth! (We know something about that, don't we...) But neither one of those extremely good movies could hold a candle to his current film, already the highest grossing documentary film ever made.

"Fahrenheit 9/11" is about President George W. Bush and his war on Iraq. It makes many powerful points — among them that the oil-rich Bush family is so tied to the anti-democratic, oil-rich "Royal Family" that runs Saudi Arabia, that the U.S. even provided airplanes to fly members of the Saudi family of Osama bin Laden (remember him?) out of the country right after the 9/11! It also shows the President of the United States being told about the attack on our country while he sits in an elementary school in Florida (with TV cameras present), and for seven long minutes, he just sits there looking lost, confused, dazed — anything but presidential. It paints a picture of a government obsessed with Iraq and Saddam Hussein while the real "villains," Osama and Al Qaida, are having a field day recruiting new blood into their cause to fight against the "invading army" of the U.S. in Iraq. Altogether, the movie left us numb, in shock, unbelieving — and more than ready for a "regime change" at home. Take our word for it, when you get out of the hell you're in now, rent "Fahrenheit 9/11" and see a bigger picture of hell...

But for just plain old fun, we recommend "Spider Man 2." Wow! This is a different kind of "Superhero" story. For one thing, this super hero looks and sounds more like the people we know — struggling to pay his bills (and not always succeeding), dealing with serious relationship problems, plagued with self doubt and uncertainty about his future, and not knowing how to get out of the critical bind he's in: both wanting a normal adolescent boy's life (with sex on his mind), but knowing he has responsibilities as a super hero! In the end, "Spider Man 2" is a beautiful love story with a happy ending — and with some of the most exciting computer-generated action scenes we've ever seen!

Besides that, we didn't do much. Oh, we played with our puppies, we read the morning paper, we even allowed ourselves the luxury of sleeping late in the morning (past 6:00 a.m.!) But we don't want to give the impression that "doing nothing" is worth nothing. On the contrary, taking time off is more than just an excuse to be lazy (even though it is that, too). Rest has the power to regenerate not just energy, but also spirit. Nobody knows better than y'all how deadening it is to do the same thing day in and day out, even when you love what you're doing. And so we're back, refreshed and ready to do battle.

And we love what we're doing, we really do. Except for winning the lottery, none of us would choose anything else. (In fact, if we won the lottery, we'd probably just continue doing what we do, only we'd be doing it rich instead of poor!) All of us came back today, after a week spent in different

pursuits, rested and ready to tackle the world again. We're suiting up to fight oppression, our batteries recharged for the never-ending struggle. Which brings us to the powerful issue of our powerful publication you now hold in your powerful hands.

First, we owe Beat readers an apology. In the last editor's note (9.24), we listed the topics that are actually addressed in this issue. Our bad! (Now you know why we needed a vacation...). So, for those of you who actually read this note, you'll recognize the following paragraphs about our topics...

Our first topic, "Right From Wrong?" gets right into people's heads and souls by questioning their beliefs, their consciences, their religion. We asked:

"Some people think it's wrong to sell drugs. They view it as selling poison. Other people say it's okay to sell drugs because they're doing it so they can feed their family. Now what we want to challenge you with this week is — how do you define right from wrong? Is it wrong to sell drugs, rob, steal, rape, murder? And where do your morals come from? Are some of these things wrong all the time or just sometimes? And why?"

Our second topic, "Father Figure," questions who plays the role of father in our writers' lives:

"Fathers play an important role throughout an individual's life. They help mold you as a child, scold you as a teenager, and even when you become an adult, you run to them for advice. Some of us are fortunate to have our biological (birth) fathers in our lives, while others confide in male relatives, childhood friends, and in some cases God to play the fatherly role in our lives. Who in your life plays the fatherly role? Is it your biological father, stepfather, uncle, spiritual father, grandfather, an OG in the neighborhood, or someone you grew up around? Why do you look up to them? Are they a positive influence in your life? Has that person been there for you through thick and thin? So tell us about your father figure."

Our last, short topic was: "I need help with..."

And, as usual, we have those wonderful Pieces of the Week from those writers who clearly don't need help with writing... From San Francisco's YGC, we have to acknowledge two outstanding pieces from Leek, one called "My Morals," and the other a very positive father piece called "Pops Been There." Also from the same unit (B5) a wonderful piece by The Ghost about feeling his victim's pain called, "One Chance To Change." From across the hall in SF/YGC's YTEC comes a very positive piece about the future called "My Plans For My Tomorrow" by Beat veteran R-Jae.

On the other side of the Bay, two 150 Crew writers stepped up big. Young Mocha took the topic on directly in his "where-you-been?" piece about father called "Father Figure." Then, the interestingly named Tydialmighty drops a poetic piece called "Times In My Life." Great writing from all of them.

While San Mateo County (Hillcrest) is still shut down due to chicken pox, and Napa remains temporarily on hold, Virginia comes back in this issue, as does Arizona, with their own fine writers who can hold their own with the best of them. The young writers in Marin continue to produce impressive writing week after week. Also, the Walden House boys and girls continue to keep the quality of this wonderful magazine consistently high. And Santa Cruz keeps pumping out quality pieces — even if the Beat editor doesn't always get their writing into the office on time... San Luis Obispo, though distant, still turns out fine writing with every issue. And there are so many more to acknowledge, but no room to do it, so just know that every writer to The Beat Within (and Without) is appreciated more than he or she knows. Thank you all!

With only a couple of weeks left to submit pieces for our tenth Editor's Note Writing Contest, you should be sending in your entries ASAP. The topic: What is your all-time favorite movie and why? Do you like love stories, horror, crime and punishment, or musicals? Maybe you prefer true-life stories, or documentaries (like the one we described above.) Whatever, tell us what you liked about it, why it moved you, etc. Top prize for this contest is a \$100 money order, followed by a \$50 M.O. for second, while third and fourth places will earn the writers \$25 each. Deadline: July 31. We hope you have some fun with this one.

We hope that describing our time off and mini-vacations doesn't put you off. Our intention is not to make you envious, but just to tell you a little about our lives here at The Beat. If any of you feel so inspired, maybe you'll write about that holiday you once took that you'll never forget — or the one you haven't taken yet, but are already planning for.

Table Of Contents

Volume 9.25

Page 3

The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter of writing and art by incarcerated youth, is published by Pacific News Service.

At The Beat Within, we go through a lot of trouble to censor inappropriate sexual remarks, foul language, and gang references. There is enough tension in our communities already—we don't aim to bolster it. It is in The Beat's interest to promote peace and unity. Our goal is to educate one another.

The Beat Within publishes the opinions and views expressed by the participants in our workshops. This is simply the pure voice of the youth. The views you read do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher, editor or staff. All rights are reserved. Nothing from this publication can be reproduced without our written permission.

To our writers: What you write could be hazardous to you. Your words have consequences, and could be used to incriminate you. Try to illuminate your feelings and viewpoints without running the risk of providing ammunition for those who might use your words against you.

Co-founders: Sandy Close and David Inocencio

Senior Editors: David Inocencio and Donna Hunter

Assistant Editors: Michael Kroll, Allan Martinez, Matt Melamed and Arlene Mitri.

Graphics/Layout Editors: Manen Pau

Staff: Pauline Craig, Jason Treas, Allan Tinker, David Muhammad, Jill Wolfson, Patricia Johnson, Jason Tuufuli, Fanny Duong, Vilasak Thebpanya, Amanda Ables, Mervyn Wool, Omar Turcious, Dennis Morton, Keir Davidson, Daniela Rible, Roy Hodgson, Yvette Coronado-Mercer, Will Roy, Eric Strenger, Devin Melvin.

Art: Much props to everyone for the great art this week.

Spiritual Advisor: Jack Jacqua

Book Donor: Marisela Norte

Beat Supporters: The Beat Within greatly acknowledges the generous support of funders of Pacific News Service's Youth Communications Programs – Annie E. Casey Foundation, California Arts Council, California Wellness Foundation, Community Foundation of Silicon Valley, Community Technology Foundation of California, Compton Foundation, Creative Work Fund, Cricket Island Foundation, Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, Ford Foundation, Free Speech TV, Hewlett Foundation, James Irvine Foundation, Louis R. Lurie Foundation, Marguerite Casey Foundation, Morris Stulsaft Foundation, Nathan Cummings Foundation, Oakland Fund For Children & Youth, Open Society Institute, Peninsula Community Foundation, Richard Rhoda Goldman Fund, Rockefeller Foundation, S.H. Cowell Foundation, San Francisco Arts Commission, Shinnyoen Foundation, Stone Foundation, Stuart Foundation, Surdna Foundation, California Endowment, Tides Foundation, Van Loben Sels/Renbe Rock Foundation, Vanguard Public Foundation, Wallace Alexander Gerbode Foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Youth Justice Funding Collaborative, and the Zellerbach Family Fund.

Writers: Thanks to all the participants in our workshops in the San Francisco's Youth Guidance Center and Log Cabin Ranch School and the Walden House Facility, Maricopa County, Arizona, Walden House, San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Luis Obispo, Alameda County, Santa Cruz County and Marin County Juvenile Halls. As well as Natural Bridge in Virginia, and Hidden Truth in Rhode Island. If you have any questions or comments about The Beat Within, or if you would like to become a subscriber, contact us at: 275 Ninth St. SF.CA. 94103 or call (415) 503-4170 or check us out at

www.thebeatwithin.org

Editor's Note	2
Piece of the Week	4
Co-Piece of the Week	6
Standouts	10
Right From Wrong	24
Father Figure	27
Weekly Writings	29
Voices In Spanish	41
The Beat Without	42



Father Figure

A daddy?
Where you been?
I was only two years old when you had all those other kids.
Selling drugs to pay the bills.
Did ya' know I never got a hug from you.
Why won't you be a father?
Instead of bein' in the club
Ya' go around and get the females to buy your kids clothes.
We are a part and can't come close.
Mama got kids by other neighborhood friends.
Come with me and explore the streets.
You see the way I have to live, your lil' girl ain't no kid.
Can you answer the question I ask you?
Are you my father?
Why I didn't get no birthday gift?
What was my first words?
Why couldn't you just stick?
When did I start walking?
Why you didn't call?
Why wasn't you the one helping me when I fall?
Why you didn't even come see me graduate?
You suppose to be my blood,
Blood is thicker than water.
I guess you'll never be my father.
But Happy Father's Day to you anyway.

-Young Mocha, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Young Mocha, there's a lot of us out there that can relate to your situation. So many questions and no answers. Just like all life experiences good and bad, the best thing we can do, is learn from them. What kind of parent will you be? What kind of man will be the father of your children?

My Plans For My Tomorrow

I thank God that I am blessed. I'm blessed with my health, my family, a house to live in, food to eat, clothes to wear, a caring heart etc...

But what I am really thankful for is for being magnificently well educated. For more than twelve years I went to a Catholic school, so I was disciplined and very well educated. They trained my brain to use it in ways I never imagined. Even though I'm kinda ghetto and thuggish, I have street smarts as well as book smarts.

The transition from Catholic school changed me completely. High school and the streets turned me out. I just started getting high and drunk, kickin' it with the wrong crowds.. and making stupid choices. My life was going downhill and I was just wasting my intellectual brain.

My mom paid everything including her left leg to put me through Catholic school so I can be smart and go to college. But when she saw my grades in high school lookin' like F's, she was furious. She said, "I just wasted my money putting you through Catholic school."

That really stuck with one. As you can see right now, my life's made a three hundred sixty degree change. I am getting straight A's now. I really want to go to a four-year college. somewhere away, far from San Francisco. I want to join a fraternity, all that. I can't wait.

I want to make my family proud. Especially for my mom. But if I can't go to a four-year college, I'll probably just go to either Heald or CLC because I really have a passion for computers and electronics.

-R-Jae YTEC

From The Beat: It seems to us that God blessed you because you made some hard choices about where your life was going. There is a lot to admire in this piece, from your honesty about wasting your mom's money (obviously, it wasn't wasted...) to your explanation of why things turned bad for you. But what we admire most about this piece is that you have more than just a hope or a wish to good in the future, you have a real plan. We hope you get into that four-year college you want to attend, but if you don't, we have confidence that you will achieve what you set your mind to achieve. In some ways, you've already done it. Thanks for this honest and inspiring piece.

Times In My Life

there are times in my life
where i don't feel whole
no matter how much
money diamonds or gold
sometimes things seem real
sometimes they seem fake
like the dreams in my head
sometimes i wish i would wake
the drama the pain
the hurt the sorrow
i'm like goddamn
i can't wait till tomorrow
to wake up
and do it all over again
lord jesus
please tell me
will this ever end
i'm on a road where
the street sign says failure
since the age of thirteen
i've been nothing but a jailbird
it hurts inside like slow suicide
killing me softly and no one's crying
the only one hurting is really just me
damn why couldn't she
just abort 't'
and now do what
bring a life into the world
an innocent child a little baby girl
her soul will be clean
and sweet as can be
the child of me
horrible 't'
i'll love her forever
and keep her safe
just as long as they let me
up outta this place

-Tydiallmighty, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Amen! What else is there to say about a poem that shows us hell then points heaven's way. Maybe you just feel like this for the moment, but it's a moment of truth — and if you build your life around it, you will come through, both for yourself and for your little girl. You sometimes wonder why you were brought into the world. Well, maybe it's just to show, you can turn your life around and grow love from sorrow — from the horror of yesterday, a better tomorrow. Now you know the only way to keep her safe, is to change your entire paper chase. And if she doesn't have Nikes on her feet for a year or two, stay on that right path, and she will be coo' — with a heart full of love for a father who came through: did right, came home at night, stayed free, and got paid, regularly.

My Morals

The life I was around when I was out was kind of wild. Even though all kinds of things was happening, everyone that was around me has some kind of morals. Like, it's people who shoot up wherever their enemies are, jack whoever slippin', and get over on whoever is gullible.

If you were to talk to these people, you would know what their morals are. The people who like to shoot up damn near everything, if you were to ask them what would stop them from shooting at an enemy, most would tell you if he or she was holding a baby, or if too many old people was around.

Now concerning people who just like robbing others for what they got, ask them what would stop them from hitting a lick. Most people say they won't rob somebody who is old or a woman of their own race.

Now on people who get over on others, if one of these people came in contact with a person who trying to make it just like them, they just might not play them.

Those are the moral of most people I know. I say most. It's just some people I know who just don't care about life or anybody else.

-Leek B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Wow, Leek, this is certainly the most interesting piece you've written, and one of the most interesting we've read in The Beat. We love the fact that you break it down and explain that there can and is a moral code even among people the general public might dismiss as having no morals. You even go the distance by pointing out that there really are those who seem to have no morals at all. We might discuss with you (over coffee some day) whether it's moral to rob a woman of some other race, but that does not take away a single thing from this thoughtful and thought-provoking piece about morality. Thanks for going beneath the surface and digging deep.

If I had a chance to go back to that one harsh day and change what happened that day, I would, I really would, because now I picture myself in their shoes, and see what they went through.

Pops Been There

I have my father in my life and I've always had my pops in my life. I don't know how it really affected me because I've never not had my father in life.

Well, my pops has shown me a lot growing up, such as how to ride dirt bikes, walk, go to the bathroom on my own, and to look at things for what they are and not for what they seem. Me and my father share everything between each other. We have a special bond, had that bond since I can remember anything that goes on in life.

When I was a toddler, we used to ride around in his money green Mustang, and he would look over and tell me, "It's me and you against the world." Now that I am locked up in here, he's still right by my side. He comes up to visit me and says, "I got your back no matter what happens in your case," so my pops is in my life and been there, and ain't going nowhere.

-Leek B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: What we love about this piece, Leek, is that we almost never read anything as positive as you describe your pops and your relationship with him. We can easily imagine you as a toddler looking up to him in that green Mustang and wanting it never to end. And it hasn't ended, even though you're here. Now, how can that unwavering love and support from your pops — that gift you have that so many of your peers aren't blessed with — help you turn a corner so that this is the last time you have to be separated? We know your pops knows how you feel, but we hope you show this to him anyway, because we know it will give him a warm feeling inside. We give him props from The Beat.

One Chance To Change

I always ask myself if I would ever get a chance to go back out and change, to do what's good for me and the people around me. Now that I want a chance to do something with myself, I'm in here locked up.

I wish I can just get one more chance to go back out and go to college and go after my dream and become a technician. I want to do something that would make my mother happy instead of bringing my mother through all this pain.

Now I can see who are the people that really care about me because now I can see that my friends are gone with the wind.

Sometimes — or better yet, all the time — I think about what got me in here and what was I thinking when I did it. All I can say is that the action that I did was really stupid. I don't know what was I really thinkin' there's no words that can explain how I feel now. Them people did not deserve that one day. If I had a chance to go back to that one harsh day and change what happened that day, I would, I really would, because now I picture myself in their shoes, and see what they went through.

If it were my family that went through all the things that they went through... Man, I really don't know what to say. All I can do is be mad at the people that did this to me, and that's why I can say that they are mad at me. All I ask is that I want them to know that I am sorry.

Now, as I sit here in my room that I've been calling home for the last five months, I just wish that I could just get one more chance to go back out and change. I want to turn my life around and do something positive for myself. I want to do something out of myself. Up till then, I'm just gon have to wait for one chance to change.

-The Ghost B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: That feeling you describe — putting yourself in the shoes of your victims — is called empathy, and it's the work of a good heart with a conscience. It is because of your remorse for what you did that we believe you will get that chance to change. In fact, we think it's already happening in you, but because you are locked up, you don't recognize it yet. You say there are no words to express how you feel, but the words "I'm sorry" carry great power when you feel them. We can tell you feel them, and that gives us respect for you and confidence that the person you want to be is already there and growing. If you let your conscience guide your future, we think you will surprise yourself with the changes that are coming. Thank you for this fine piece.

Too Much Violence

Why is there so much violence? About 50 years ago there wasn't as much violence, gangs, drug dealing, etc., as there is now.

The reason for that is that 50 years ago children were raised differently. Children read more books back then. They were into education, not all of them, but many more than there are now. That is because 50 years ago there wasn't as much television, less technology, less drugs. Kids were not distracted by all the things they have now.

If they didn't have as much entertaining as they have now, they would be bored and that's why they would put their minds into education. All the distraction is the main problem for all this violence and drugs.

-Johnny B1, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We're not sure if you're right or wrong, but we really like that you analyzed this situation and came up with your own idea for why things are as bad as they are. You're certainly right that 50 years ago, there were not nearly as many technological distractions, so people probably did read more then, and take advantage of education. Since we aren't going to give up our televisions or computers, do you have any suggestions for how to turn this situation around?

High Risk Drug Sales

Some people sell drugs so they can provide for themselves. And some people sell drugs to put food in the house.

But a lot of people I know that sell drugs, they sell drugs because they have kids and they need money to provide for them. Some people sell drugs 'cause they don't have jobs. But me, personally, I don't sell drugs.

I think selling drugs is bad, 'cause you could end up in prison. Or you could end up killing someone, 'cause the drug deal might go bad. Or it might cost you your life in the long run. I know a lot of people that stuff has happened to.

But a lot of these young kids today, are growing up seeing the older kids out on the corner — selling drugs, sporting nice clothes, wearing gold teeth, and driving nice cars. So they figure they want the same thing in life.

So next thing you know these young kids are on the corner doing the same thing, 'cause they have seen what some of their friends been having — and they want the same.

And some kids come from homes where there is no cash flow and their parents have no jobs. So these kids think going and selling drugs will get them some money, and that's what they do.

-Lil' S, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thanks for writing such a serious piece, explaining just why so many young people are out there selling drugs in the street. You understand that the risk involved, is just too high, because too many things can (and eventually do) go bad. Yet for many, the danger just seems to increase the glamour, at least until it comes down hard on them; and the bills that need paying or fashionable clothes feel more real than a steady job down the road. So they go for fool's gold and later pay the toll.

**kids think going and
selling drugs will get them
some money**

Hooked On Selling It

It is wrong to sell drugs, because most of the time, we just sell them to old people that was just like us at a time. We call the people we sell drugs to — knocks.

Most knocks use' to sell drugs themselves and just tried it and got hooked. It didn't happen to me though, because I was just trying to get my money.

But when you try to quit selling drugs, and the knocks come back looking for it — it feels like you're missing money. So you make sure you have it, so you will not miss any money. It's like you hooked on selling it!

But some people just do it to support their family. Others do it just because they want quick money. But in the long run, it's wrong — because you're up in lock-up, just like me, for a dope case.

-Dj, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You show a compassionate heart in seeing yourself in the knocks. And you take the "to support your family" rationale one step further. Most impressively, you show the pull of running into knocks, and how it can play out to get you hooked on holding and selling twenty-four/seven. Now put that knowledge to use and change what you do! You're no fool.

**It is wrong to sell drugs, because most of
the time, we just sell them to old people
that was just like us at a time.**

The Best Father There Is

I am blessed because I have both of my parents and I live with them in the same house. They never argue unless I get into trouble; then they are both in a bad mood and get all upset.

I am proud of my father because he is always by my side, whether I do right or wrong. He works his ass off so that my mom and my three brothers can have everything we need, and even things we don't need.

He works hard. He doesn't do drugs. He seldom drinks alcohol, and when he does, it is not a problem; but when he does drink, it's because he is upset with my negative actions, upset that it reflects on him.

He always tells me to go to school, and he hates it when I am late to class. He wants the best for me. He tries his best to keep me out of trouble, but sometimes I just run into trouble. But even when I'm in trouble, no matter what, he always stays by my side and puts me in the right path.

I love my father. He is the best father there will ever be. It makes me sad that I couldn't be with him on Father's Day.

When I go to Camp, I'm going to spend all of my home passes with my parents, my brothers and my beautiful girlfriend. I am going to spend all the time possible by their sides — and be a good role model for my little brothers, because I know they look up to me.

-Krushar, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You offer high praise, and give examples to back it up. It must hurt you, too, to bring this pain into his life. But you already know the best way to make it up to him. Go home and do just what you say: become that good role model for your little brothers. To mess up and straighten up, is itself a valuable model. Just make sure you follow through with that happy ending to this tough time. Analyze what had you headed in the wrong direction and avoid setting yourself up for more trouble.

My Father, My Role Model

My father is my role model. He's always there when I need him — but not when I'm doing wrong.

Any time I do something wrong, I have to hear this speech. I call it "the long speech." I call it that, because he talks for hours about knowing right from wrong. He talks about goals, the outside world, etc. Usually I'd let it come in one ear and go out the other — but now I think that it has caught onto me, and brought me into the real world.

I see, hear, and think, every day: somebody's getting killed today, somebody's getting put in jail, somebody's getting a scholarship. And I want to be one of the ones getting seen getting a scholarship!

My father is a role model to me, because I feel that he was in the same position I am, and he fought his way out. Anybody can do it, but he did do it. I don't mean he got a scholarship, but he made something out of his life — by getting his GED, working as an intern, then working his way up to becoming a manager for several record companies!

-Rell diggidy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Scholarships are way cool, for sure. But to work your way up in the real world, day by day, month by month, and year by year, demonstrates the ability and commitment required for success in life, with or without a scholarship. Your father is a role model indeed. Thank you for sharing his example. We're glad you're finally feeling it yourself — "the long speech"!

**I see, hear, and think every day:
somebody's getting killed today,
somebody's getting put in jail,
somebody's getting a scholarship.**

Right From Wrong

To me, the right is seeing African-American or any ethnicity, and helping them out because they might be in a poverty-stricken state. The wrong would be people selling and using drugs to fill their pockets and put extra stuff on their table, and messin' their lives up. It is also wrong for black people to sell dope and other drugs to other black people, and the same for the other cultures.

Some people see broken down neighborhoods and think gangstas, hoodlums, gang bangers, hustlas, and nobodies. But if you come and really check it out, you will find 50% of the people having potential of getting out da ghetto.

-Young J-Doe B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We think you're so right. We often wonder why people, even people living in poverty, would mess up their own communities and people. Like you say, it's wrong to mess up anyone's life, but to do it to your own people is a mystery. We're very interested to know what you see as the main difference between that 50% who can make it out of the ghetto and that 50% who can't. Is it just a matter of personal choice, a matter of pure chance, or is there something from the outside — a helping hand, a live-in father, the influence of God or church — that spells the difference between success and failure? What do you think would be the most powerful and beneficial help the outside community (the government?) could provide to make a difference?

**50% of the people have
the potential to make it
out of the ghetto.**

The Underworld

it's dark it's deep
no one ever sleeps
in the underworld

they sneak they creep
without one peep
in the underworld

they watch and wait
make no mistakes
in the underworld

if you slip
you will not be caught
in the underworld

they feed on human flesh
and they hate faith
in the underworld

they refuse to step
into the light but some
do come out from
the underworld

from shifters
more like face lifters
in the underworld

in the underworld
angels ain't welcome
but some come
to fight against evil
in the underworld

will they win
or will they lose
in this vicious war
in the underworld

when will people see
the evil amongst us
maybe when we
realize we are
in the underworld

-Ben, 150 Crew

From The Beat: These spirits of the underworld, principalities in league with the devil they're called in the Bible, that feed on flesh and blood, are reduced to nothing — when seen and understood! For their power is but our own; they have no life outside our flesh and bone. Like possession by addictive drugs, we can be possessed by spiritual thugs — but it's just insane! They don't care about the pain that devours your heart and seizes your brain if you continue in their game. Enlist on their side and not only angels cry, but mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers — and you, if you escape to see the truth! For you can be the proof of victory. If you feel your humanity, you're free!

Say Something Positive

I just wanna say a little something positive, feel me. All of this shhh is a set up. We're just pawns in a chess-game, and we don't even know it.

In the 1700s when we were slaves, they didn't want us to read or write because if we did we'd overturn power. So they kept us uneducated. We overcame.

In the 1900s they denied us our rights and they killed our leaders, but we still overcame. Then we had the Black Panthers and we were unstoppable. Then the government got smart and messed with the Cubans, and filled our neighborhoods with crack cocaine. We ain't been the same since.

A famous person once said, "Give them guns and drugs and sit back and watch them kill each other."

-Afro B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We may dispute some of your "facts" (for example, the government stopped the Black Panther party by straight-up killing its leadership), we definitely agree with your point. Who are you quoting with that last sentence? We know that white people have guns and white people have drugs, so can we just sit back and watch them kill each other? There's something more than what you've described, even though what you've described is true. Besides guns and drugs, what else is killing your communities?

Dopesick

I'm getting released soon
But there's not much to look forward to
Probation will keep me trapped
To make me watch my every step
My mom guzzles down liquor
With her pills and dope
She makes me sick
And crazed with jealousy
Temptations will kill me
'Cause I can't keep my priorities straight
I'll wanna jump right back to that cris
And with no one to stop me
But myself
I don't know if I can do it
This shhh ain't a joke
This is what happens
When you start slamming dope

-Audrey, Marin

From The Beat: Great poem, Audrey. You put your dilemma right out there. It's a real problem for young folks when their mothers are junkies, alcoholics or worse. The very person who is supposed to guide you and give you strength is showing you what she considers "normal" enough to present to her daughter. It makes it doubly hard for you to know and do what's right. Can you be stronger or braver than your mother and make sure you stop sabotaging your young life and future with drugs, drink? Can you look at your mom's life and see what yours could become? As loyal as you feel towards your mother, you may have to make sure you survive and flourish. If you can help your mom as well, that's all good. You may have to secure your life first, then help your mom. Can you do it?

**We're just pawns in a
chess-game, and we
don't even know it.**

Lil' Hifey

when i was little
never had a ro' model
just a pistol a blunt
and a hennessey bottle
in a stolen car
as i hit the throttle
never had a father or a mother
i was a dad to my little brother
when i was three
not even my parent'
cared about me
instead of taking care of me
they'd rather smoke 'd'
now i'm walking in their footsteps
i'm the only one left
i'm in the hall
trying to get my hair wet

-Willie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You write with the force of a short uppercut, got your readers floored; but still wondering about "get my hair wet"! We hope you means to clean up your act! 'Cause you don't need to follow in footsteps like that. You deserve to go farther, do better, and that's a fact. Addiction's a terrible disease, can bring a family to its knees — get off that path! And fast!

**I'll wanna jump right back
to that cris
And with no one to stop me
But myself
I don't know if I can do it**

I Want My Father In My Life

I wouldn't mind having my father around. He hasn't been in my life for a long, long time. I do think of how he is doing.

And I wonder why he left his kids and if it bothers him to not want to see his son. I would be feeling down if I was not with my kids. I don't see how a father doesn't want his son or daughter that he took the time to make. It's wrong.

But I do want my father in my life. My mother's not really there for me most of the time like she's supposed to be. I do believe fathers play a good role in the lives of their children when they want to.

I think of my father all the time. I know that he lives in Los Angeles. When I was still little, my mother left my father. They say he did drugs.

-Mark, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You never know, maybe your father will appear someday, cleaned up and ready to make whatever amends he can to the son he was never there for. You deserve a father's love and attention. Maybe someday you can yourself be a good father.

Drinking Since I Was A Baby

I have a bad habit of drinking alcohol. I got my habit from family and friends. My parents used to give me alcohol when I was a baby so I would go to sleep. As I got older, I've seen a lot of people drink alcohol, so I decided to do it. I was brought up around a bunch of alcoholics. I started drinking real heavy when I was 14 or 15.

I drink liquor and beer at the same time. I drink all day, every day. When I get stressed out, I drink like my mind is bad. I love to get drunk. It makes me feel good. I can't go a day without it.

Now that I'm locked up, I can't drink, but I still think about it every day. I miss my alcohol. I like to drink Crown Royal, Hennessy, Remy Martin, Everclear, Bacardi and E&J. I want to stop drinking, but it's going to be hard.

When I drink, I don't care. I like to hurt people. That's why I want to stop before I end up in prison for the rest of my life for killing someone. To stop drinking, I would need to stay away from it and stop thinking about it. But it's going to be hard to do that. Shout out to Joe and Corey. I'm out.

-Lil' Kelly, Virginia

From The Beat: It sounds like you were born into having a problem with alcohol. No disrespect to your parents, but that was very irresponsible and unfair of them to give an infant ANY amount of alcohol. You are getting older now and can take your life back from all the "drink alcohol" conditioning of your childhood and teen life. Now that you are older, you can take responsibility of your life and choices if you want. You can go to meetings (they are everywhere), read books about surviving addiction ("The NA Basic Text" you can get for only \$3!), find friends who will accept your success . . . Having even a small desire to change is hope. This habit will kill you slowly/maybe even quickly. This habit will also incarcerate you in a hot second.

**My parents used to give
me alcohol when I was a
baby so I would
go to sleep.**

RIP Ron

I woke up one morning. I couldn't believe what they told me! I had to see the news for myself. When I heard that — it made me cry — I asked God why — it had to be him!

They shot him over something hella bootsy. They shot him over a stupid de bootsy jacket that cost a G. Every time when I was a lil' boy he told me — every time he saw me, he would give me a couple of bucks here and there because I was doing good in school.

I was hecka mad I couldn't go to his funeral. When I get out, I want to get a tattoo that says, "RIP Ron." One thing I've learned from this is not to fight over something that's not worth fighting over.

This is coming straight from the heart — I cried when I found out! I know he's up in heaven looking down on me, saying, "Lil' Cousin, do good." I just want to say — rest in peace to my cousin, Ron.

-Alex, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's always difficult to lose someone you love, but to lose someone to such senseless, thuggish gunplay as to be shot for a jacket — it has to be hard to take. But we hope our readers appreciate the lesson learned about fighting. And to the words you ascribe to your cousin, speaking to you from heaven, "Lil' Cousin do good," we can only add: Amen! RIP Ron.

I Need You Now

Dedicated To My Mom:
I need you now to hold me
To look in my eyes
To be there for me
As I was for you
I love you
Like you loved me
Help me understand this world
And its mysteries
Can't you see
I need you
More than anything?
Help me stay
The way I am
Love used to be
Everything to me
And you I need you now
To help me
Get rid of all my hate
I want you to know
That I love you so so much
Show me the time
We used to be together
I used to think
I could live forever
In your arms
I know you've broken my heart
More than once
But I want you to know
That I still love you
And I will forever

-Jason, Marin

From The Beat: Beautifully sad poem. We wish your mother could hear or feel your cries and come to you. You need her. You have a kind, unselfish, forgiving heart. We hope it can help sustain you, as you venture through your young life. You have our hearts.

**One thing I've
learned from
this is not
to fight over
something
that's not worth
fighting over.**

Ella Es Los Dos, Mi Madre Y Padre

¿Cómo estan? Bueno, yo estoy bien. Yo nunca he vivido con mi papa. Antes de nacer, él se separó de mi mama y desde entonces ella siempre ha estado conmigo. Desde que estaba chiquito ella se ha estado sacrificando, trabajando duro para sacarme adelante. Ella es mi papá, y mi mamá. Yo conozco a mi papá y cuando estaba en mi país, él me iba a visitar y me sacaba a pasear o a comer.

Un mes antes de venirme a la US, me fui a vivir con él y yo no sabía que él tenía otra familia, hasta el día que fui a su casa. Tamien tenía otro hijo de mi edad.

Los primeros días que estuve ahí estuvieron bien, los familiares del niño me trataban bien. Pero ella se puso celosa y empezó a pelear conmigo. Los días pasaron y yo me quería ir, pero me daba pena decirle a mi papa porque temía que se pusiera triste, y decidí a quedarme callado. Entonces pasó un mes, y cuando me volví a encontrar con mi mama, estaba muy feliz, pero me daba pena con mi papa.

Todo este tiempo que he vivido con mi mama, me he sentido muy feliaz, pero le quiero pedir perdón por todo el daño que le hice al venir a YGC. Quiero que me de otra oportunidad, sólo les quiero decir que si ustedes viven con sus mamás, y papas, que los representen, y los cuiden y los quieran mucho.

From The Beat: Debistes pasar por momentos muy duros, tener que soportar a esa familia que no te queria. Pero sabes, aunque tu padre te haya dejado, él hizo lo posible para tenerte a tu lado y darte tu parte. El separo entre ellos, ha de haber tenido algunos problemas, que talvez tú no entiendes. Dale una oportunidad, sabes con lo que escribistes se nota que él te quiero y tú no quieres que él note que estubistes triste ahí. Ahora, tienes que darte cuenta que estando aqui le estas haciendo mucho daño a tu madre como a tu padre. Deberias de pensar en las personas que ha estado contigo siempre.

She Is Both My Mother And Father

How are you doing? As for me, I'm doing fine. I've never lived with my father. Before I was born, he left my mother and ever since then, she's always been with me. Since I was little, she has sacrificed a lot and worked very hard to take me ahead in life. She is both my father and my mother. I know who my father is, and when I was in my country, I would go and visit him and he would take me out or go eat.

A month before I came to the US, I went to go live with him and I didn't know that he had another family until the day that I went to his house. He also had another child my age.

The first few days that I was there, things went fine. The little boy's family members treated me fine, but then he began to get jealous and started to fight with me. The days passed and I wanted to leave, but I was embarrassed to tell my father because I was scared that he would get sad, and I decided to stay quiet. So a month went by and I was reunited with my mother. I was very happy, but I was still embarrassed with my father.

All this time that I've lived with my mother, I have felt very happy, but I want to ask her for forgiveness for all the damage that I caused her by coming to YGC. I want her to give me another opportunity. All I want to say is, if you live with your mother, father, or both of them, to respect them, take care of them, and love them a whole lot.

-Pastrulo B1, SF/YGC

Escape

I wish I could escape
From the voices in my head
But there never seems to be any peace

When I try to run away
They're always forcin' me to stay
These voices tellin' me I'll never be free

Then when someone's by my side
And I decide I'll be all right
I'm always left alone and have no more hope

So now I'm stuck in hell
All by myself - I'm getting scared
Because these voices laugh and just won't let go

They're always tellin' me I'm worthless
What I did just wasn't worth this
Payin' the price for livin' the life of a thug

Fillin' my every thought with pain
Not a moment goes by when I feel sane
Trapped in a dark corner and I'm flending for love

-Michael, San Luis Obispo

From The Beat: You're looking at life that few people can even imagine living. Everybody in the system writes about a time when they hit rock bottom. Do you think you've hit bottom? Rock bottom is losing almost all everything you have, but it also means that life gets better, one way or another. Do you have any voices that tell you that you can write, that others have walked in your shoes and still managed to succeed? Do you think there is a way to restore your hope? How?

Prohibido E Incorrecto

Es correcto. Vender drogas es totalmente prohibido e incorrecto, porque al vender drgas es sierto que se gana un dinero, pero estamos matando montones de personas. La droga es un veneno totalmente peligroso que ninguna persona debe de ingerir. Todo tipo de droga lleva a la calle a todos, hace que robes, y hasta hace que mates a las personas. Y estoy consiente que esto sucede todo el tiempo.

Eso de andar en drogas, no es bueno, no se los deseo a ningún ser humano. Hay que trabajar y estudiar para ser alguien importante en esta vida.

From The Beat: Esperamos que muchos lean este pedazo, que realmente es lo correcto. No es bueno ingerir cosas malas que destruye la vida del ser humano. Hay muchisimas cosas mejores que esto, que andar de loco. Nosotros nos preguntamos porque ustedes los jóvenes no pueden ver que en la vida hay muchisimas cosas linda que esperan por uno.

Prohibited And Wrong

That's right. Selling drugs is totally prohibited and wrong because, yes, you can make money, but we are killing tons of people. Drugs are poisons that are really dangerous and something that people should not consume. Every kind of drug brings people to the streets, makes people rob, and it might even make you kill people. Also, I am convinced that this does happen all the time.

Being on drugs is not good. I don't wish that upon any human being. One has to work and study so one can become someone important in this world.

-Acosto B5, SF/YGC

El Infierno Donde Vivimos

Un paraíso es lo que todos buscan, y el morir es lo que todos encuentran. Donde vivimos es un infierno. Si les fallamos a Dios, volvemos a nacer, no vamos a ir al mismo paraíso que todos buscan. Todo este mundo está lleno de ignorancia, donde cada quien quiere hacer lo que quiere, pero para toda ocasión hay una lección y se consecuencias que debes de pagar.

En mi caso, estoy encerrado, separado de las personas que quiero, pero no me aguito, porque así es la vida loca que vivo. Esto es todo lo que he aprendido. A veces me pongo bien prendido para escaparme de este mundo para buscar una solución, después me que pongo bien pacheco para bajarme del avión, pero me doy cuenta que esa no es la salida. Que es solo el principio de conocer el infierno, donde hoy vivimos.

From The Beat: Estas en lo cierto, muchos de nosotros en vez de buscar la salida para nuestra vida normal, nos guiamos hacia otro rumbo donde las cosas de ese mundo nos hunden más abajo. Y tú vas por ese camino equivocado, creyendo que escapando de esa manera podrías resolver los problemas que tienes. Esa es la manera incorrecta, deberías de buscar ayuda con tu adicción y comprender que esa salida es la que te tiene detras de las rejas.

Hell Is Where We Live

A paradise is what everyone seeks, and death is what everyone finds. Where we live is a hell. If we follow God's words, we're reborn, and we are not going to the same paradise that everyone seeks. This whole world is full of ignorance, and a world where everyone does what they want to do, but for every occasion, there's a lesson and consequences that you have to pay.

In my case, I am locked up, separated from the people that I love, but I don't get down because that's the crazy life that I live. This is everything that I have learned. Sometimes I get really wasted to escape from this world and look for a solution, but when my high goes away, I realize that this is not the way out and, instead, it is the beginning of meeting hell where we live.

-Tripiado, 150 Crew

I Love My Father

My father is not just my friend, he is my patna. I respect him a lot. I wouldn't trade my father for a million bucks. He has gave me so much support. Even though we've had our differences we still respect each other to the fullest.

Even though my father is going through some hard times at the moment, he still keeps his head up, and why? To teach me how to be a man. What little energy he does have, he puts forth all of it to support me enough to make it through this time of my life which isn't so easy either.

Even though my father isn't around at the moment, he still calls me every day to see how I'm doing, and make sure I'm alright and keeping my head up. I love him.

-East Africa YTEC, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Sounds like a very good man. We hope you know how lucky your are, especially when we read how many young men and women have no fathers at all! How are you helping him in his rough times? Is there anything you would change about the way your father has raised you? What is your favorite memory with your father?

Todos Los Que Venden Drogas

Pues yo pienso que todos los que venden drogas no se dan cuenta que sólo estan ayudando a los demás a que se maten entre si. Para la gente que los compran, está bien porque ellos lo necesitan. Sin drogas, ellos no pueden vivir.

Otra cosa, hay personas que venden que lo hacen por necesidad y hay otros que lo hacen por parte de su diversión. Creo que la mayoría que lo hacen esto son huevones, y dicen que lo hacen por falta de trabajo. Pero creo que eso es mentira, porque trabajo hay donde quiera, hasta en nuestro propio país. Ellos lo hacen porque quieren hacer más dinero y lo hacen en forma facil. Después cuando caen aqui, es ahí cuando empiezan a llorar, que los dejen salir.

Hay otros que dicen que estan aqui por nada, que no hicieron nada. Yo creo que aqui nadie es inocente, creo que todo han de haber hecho algo o si no, no estuvieran aqui. O sea que les digo que dejen de mentir entre ellos mismos y que sean hombre como yo. Dejen de llorar como bebes.

From The Beat: Es verdad, esperamos que todos los que venden droga, sepan escuchar estas palabras que estas diciendo. Con hacer estos actos lo único que estamos haciendo es destruyendonos, y destruyendo a muchas familias, a muchos hijos, padres, hermanos, primos, hasta madres. Amigos, piensen bien las cosas porque andar en cosas malas, se que las vendan o las consuman, es malo ante Dios y antes nuestra sociedad. Te agradecemos por tu ayuda, y esperamos que todo te salga bien desde ahora en adelante.

Those Who Sell Drugs

Well, I think that those who sell drugs don't realize that they are helping others to kill themselves. Those who buy them aren't tripping about selling, because they need them, because without drugs, they can't live.

Another thing, there are people who sell drugs because of their needs, and others do it for joy. I think the majority of those who do this are lazy and they excuse themselves by saying that there aren't jobs. But I think that is a lie, because there are jobs everywhere, even in our own native country. They do this because they want to make more money in an easy way. Then, when they get caught, that is when they start to cry and beg to get released.

There are others who say that they are here for nothing, that they didn't do a thing. I think that in here no one is innocent. I think we are all here for something, otherwise, they wouldn't be here. So stop lying to yourselves and be a man like me. Stop crying like babies.

-Popeye B4, SF/YGC

Otra cosa, hay personas que venden que lo hacen por necesidad y hay otros que lo hacen por parte de su diversión

I Wonder As I Wonder

I wonder as I wonder
Out under the big blue sky.

Why you

Of all people had to die?

I wonder as I wonder

How you are

I wish you were here

Instead of being so far.

I wonder as I wonder

If you're sitting up a cloud

While you were here

I hope I made you proud

I wonder as I wonder

Out under the big blue sky

Why you, Raymond,

Had to leave without a last good-bye.

-Elizabeth, Durango/Arizona

From The Beat: Beautiful poem of sadness and longing. Each person faces death in their own way, struggling with letting go and hanging on to the one we love. Did Raymond ever express to you his desires for your life, your future? Is it something positive for you? If so, can you find an expression of his spirit in your daily life that will empower you to live a positive life, to celebrate life and stay free?

To The Beat

That one thing is my baby

I had to leave her in the past

'Cause I couldn't take care of her.

I wanted her to have a
life I didn't have.

I wanted her to go to school,
to have good friends
like I never had.

I want to see her succeed in school
and get good grades.

I want her to go to college
and become a

Lawyer, doctor, nurse.

I just want her to be responsible.

And when she has kids, I want
her to be the mother I wish I could have
been to her.

I want her to remember me
by giving her up for someone else,
making her life better

The one thing is my baby.

-Anna, Durango/Arizona

From The Beat: This is a heavy, heart-felt piece, Anna. You show tremendous courage in putting your baby's needs first in the hopes that you can give her a better future. It's not too late for your own dreams either. What are they? Don't give up on yourself.

**I wanted her
to go to school,
to have good friends
like I never had.**

Mi Vida

Yo acá nada más me la paso pensando en que cuando voy a salir de estas estupidas rejas. Desearía salir pronto porque me siento desesperado pero ni modo.

Yo soy un gangster y nosotros no nos aguitamos. Somos vatos con valor y estamos listos para todo hasta la muerte. No todas las veces me siento así, fuerte. A veces me siento devil sin saber que hacer. Hay veces cuando estoy en mi cuarto y se me salen las lágrimas, pero cuando me digo a mí mismo que decidí vivir esta vida, agarro valor de mí mismo y digo, "a la verga con el mundo," pero adentro siento otra cosa. Me siento como si fuera devil por dentro aunque por fuera soy fuerte.

From The Beat: Amigo, sabemos que debes de estar muy desesperado ahí. Deberías de estar muy preocupado por la vida que llevas, porque esta vida de gangster como el llamas, no te llevará a un buen destino. ¿Amigo, si sabes que eres devil por dentro, porque desimular y pretender que eres otro cuando puedes ser tu mismo? Dios nos hizo de una manera, y uno debe ser de la manera como es, no pretender ser otra persona, eso se llama copiar.

My Life

In here, I've just been thinking about when I'm going to get out of these stupid cells. I wish I could get out soon because I feel desperate in here, but here I am.

I'm a gangster and we don't get worried. We are guys with courage, and we are ready to whatever comes up until we die. I don't feel like this all the time I feel like this, strong. Sometimes I feel weak without knowing what to do. There are times when I'm in my room and tears show up, but I soon tell myself that I decided to choose to live this life, and I get courage and I say, "the hell with this world" but in the meantime, inside myself, I feel a different thing. I feel as if I were weak from within myself, and strong from my external.

-Popeye B4, SF/YGC

What's Right And What's Wrong?

First off let me introduce myself. My name is Trenell aka Tree Girl.

I think it is right to grind because most people can't afford to receive a job.

What's Right...

I feel that is it right to steal because things are too expensive nowadays. Even females and them cars. See me, I'm a thief, I see something I want you best to believe I'm gon' get it.

People who is out there struggling out there and these governors and the President people do not have to worry about money. Us people do, who is out there struggling.

We need to rob these government people and President should get rob. We shouldn't rob people who worked hard to get theirs. So us struggling Oakland folks should rob the government, but that's never going to happen.

Once I get out I am going to do what's right and my baby, Corn-Freaky, needs to do right.

What's Wrong...

It is wrong for a female to get raped. No matter what a female do or say. We should not get raped. Any ninja rape me, that's your life. I never been raped and I will never get raped. But never say never.

Never put yo' self in that situation to get raped.

-T Girl, 150 Crew

From The Beat: These are some really strong words. We agree with you, a female should never, ever get raped. That's wrong! And no one should rob others, especially hard working people. Stealing from the government, well hmm... that makes us think. How do you steal from the government? Maybe the best solution would be, if the government would distribute the money fairly to ALL communities. Then there would be no reason to steal from them, or anyone. The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer, that's how it works. How do we solve this? We don't know. Lead us to a solution, and we will follow.

Stepfather Figure

I never had a father figure in my life until now. I had a stepfather; His name was Otis (RIP Odie'O) He's been in my life and my older cousin's. My mother is my father too.

I'm happy that my biological father stepped into my life. After me being in so many group homes, I am really happy to see my father step into my life. My dad is young and hecka cool. I always thought he was mean, but once I got to know him he's not that type of person.

I never called my father "Dad" and the things that he does for me makes me wanna call him dad. I call him Baby Joe. I love my dad.

Happy Father's Day.

-T Girl, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Sometimes people have a hard time relating to a parent when they haven't been around. It's really nice that you can open yourself up to your father. We hope your relationship with him continues to grow.

That One Thing

That one thing that has always kept me without more, always keep me fascinated, was my dream.

My dream to make a difference
My dream to change the world.
Being gifted with the ability to understand science has led me to stand up on science technology and the way our bodies work.

But that one thing that I would really love to do is stand up and infected with HIV/AIDS.

I believe by doing this I could change the world
And possibly, stop the spreading of this deadly disease.

-Elizabeth, Durango/Arizona

From The Beat: Elizabeth, it is refreshing to know that you have or had a desire/dream for your life. You write about it in the past tense, does that mean you've given this dream up? We hope not. We're confused about another thing, too. Are you saying you want to be infected with HIV/AIDS? We hope we're misreading you and that you meant you want to work to cure HIV/AIDS. Please give us more details on whether you're still pursuing your dream or not.

Right From Wrong

I can say it's wrong that we sell drugs. We are giving somebody bad stuff so that in the end, they end up OD'ing. You had something to do with that man or woman dying. It's like saying you're a murderer.

At the same time, I think it's right because it's hard for a person in the ghetto to get a good job. People always look at you as a person who cannot be trusted, and stuff like that. By selling drugs, the money comes quicker, so that means more money, more food on the table.

-Noriega B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: This sounds like a vicious circle to us. You can't get a decent job because people think you cannot be trusted, so you sell drugs to make money, and when you do, you give "them" another reason to think you can't be trusted! Is there a way off this circle? What kind of job training or actual jobs (and with what kind of salary) would reduce the drug trade? What kind of job would you like to learn how to do?

The Worst Thing For A Man

The worst thing for a man is when his freedom is taken away

When he's in a room with four walls as his best friend
When everything is changing in the outside world and he feels that he's being left behind

When he's not out there with his mother,
brother, sister — and
in some cases in here, our sons and daughters

When he knows that
he's not the only person hurting because
of what he did, and where he is at now,
but the people he calls

"Loved ones"

When he knows that he has lost that one true love because
he's not there with her

It eats him up alive

because he knows that there's nothing that he can do
The worst thing for a man in jail is to have a broken heart
When they have this man feeling like an animal locked up in
a cage because people think

he's a beast in the jungle he calls home

The worst thing for a man is when he is all alone, thinking
about what he did

and how he lost every chance he had to do with
himself

But now that he's locked up,
he sees how much life is so important

Damn, but it feels now that he doesn't have a chance to go
back out and change

The worst thing for a man!

-The Ghost B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Your list of "worst" things truly make us sad. But even if you feel that you don't have a chance to change, you do. The old saying, "This is the first day of the rest of your life" is true. We're not saying that change is easy. It isn't. But we are saying you can do it if you set your mind to it. If the worst thing for a man is to have his freedom taken (and we agree that for us, losing our freedom would be the worst), then what can you do to regain and maintain your freedom? Because even if it's hard to do that, it must be easier than "the worst thing for a man."

I Need Help

It just like when I'm on the block wit' a gun. It feel like I'm God because I can control life or death, and it is critical.

-Spoon B4, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Some people may not think it's fair that a two-sentence piece gets designated a Standout, but it seems to us that you have put your finger on something very, very important: People who use guns feel like God. If you feel that way with a single gun on the block, imagine how soldiers feel when they are shooting huge rockets or firing down from warplanes high above. How do you think God feels about you feeling like God?

**...it's hard for
a person in
the ghetto to
get a good job.**

Thoughts Of You

Damn I miss you so much, feel like yesterday I was with you.
The more I think of you the more my soul flends for you,
you are my everything.
Just replaying the scene in the park.
Looking in your eyes.
You holding me so close.
Craving for the desire to have you.
The urges, the heat, knowing that we loved each other made me weak,
as we slept through the night.
Just to feel your arms reaching to keep me close.
To waking up with breakfast and you goin' to work with India Irie playing.
Just knowing that we never made love.
The way you made me laugh.
The way we talk about eternity.
The way you yelled at me when I didn't check in by making one phone call.
Spending time at the zoo.
Coming home with gifts every other day.
You telling me you love me to showing you love me.
As I lay down on my back,
thinking and hoping we can be together once again when ever I...
When ever I become...
When ever I become of age to let you know the truth about me.
Your friend your soul mate, your crash, your soon to be lover, your woman.

-Jermaica , 150 Crew

From The Beat: Jermaica, We love hearing about what a loving relationship you created and how there are so many ways to give and receive love with someone. It's cool to hear what a special experience you had with your love. What did you do to create such a caring relationship with someone, and how could you use those skills to nurture yourself today?

Is It Right?

Right from wrong? Shhh, there's a lot of different ways people think of things to define them right from wrong.

People look at selling drugs, like you say, as not wrong; because it's to feed their families. And five-oh sees it as wrong, because it's illegal. Stealing, robbing, killing, and such; I believe is wrong — but others would think of it as survival.

Shhh, me, I was doing shhh like that because I needed to. But I knew it was bad! You just don't think about it while your action is in process. Thinking begins when one is paying for that thoughtless act, or sometimes it begins because sometimes people start to realize.

Like I said, it's all based on how someone looks at it — the point of view from which they see what they're doing as right or wrong. But some people just cannot comprehend the situations they put themselves in. A lot of people in reality cannot even define right from wrong.

Some people ask us, me — us, the homies: "Is it right to gangbang?" And, "Do you know the difference between right and wrong?" Yeah, we know! Just like the world around us though, "We just don't give a —!" That's just the way the world revolves around knowing the difference between right and wrong.

So now you know, in case you didn't, the world, or the majority of people in the world, just do not care about the defining right from wrong.

And I just want to say to Yvette, who won't be coming to Camp anymore — farewell.

-Lil' Jose, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If people don't really care about the difference between right and wrong, it's only up to a certain point — a different point for different people. When faced with certain acts (committed by themselves or others), those who "don't care" can suddenly and deeply care! So don't let that attitude take you where you really don't want to be in body (prison), heart (guilt), or mind (shame). Keep it simple: do what you know is right.

Confession

I gotta confess
about my loneliness
and stress
a mind of illusions
is not blessed
a life of confusion
cannot be kept
'cause every second of the day
is pain and sorrow
even if i close my eyes
until tomorrow
i will always be filled
with harsh-oh
i'm so mainey and weak
strong on the outside
weak on the inside
because all of my
dreams is wasted
down the drain
just did eleven months
at camp and now
my p o recommending me
to a group home in chicago
but i hope i don't go
if i do it's all bad
and my life will be miserable

-Lil' Bk, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We hope you don't have to go so far from home. Eleven months in the life of a sixteen year old is a long time gone. Yet wherever you go or don't, it's time you fight for what you want on the battleground of your heart. Pass on drink, weed, and fisticuffs — 'cause you know you've had enough of what it brings you. You've shown you're tough on the outside, now show it within you. When change begins, you'll begin to win!

Your Conscience

Right and wrong? I think everybody should know it or be taught it. I know right from wrong because I think I was raised that way.

But even though I was raised that way, I think that there's something natural that tells us right from wrong called a conscience. Now I know everybody ain't got one and that's scary. So if you don't have one let me break it down.

Right and wrong is like Yin and Yang, it's good and bad, light and darkness, sane and insane, good and evil, God or Satan, heaven or hell. Get my point?

-Wolfy B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Oh, yeah, we get your point all right. If some people don't have a conscience, where does conscience come from? How do some people have one and others don't? Or, do you think everybody has one, but some people just ignore theirs? Can we (society) do anything to nurture an individual's conscience so that it can blossom and bear fruit? What?

Fathers Are Important

I think fathers are important to a boy becoming a man. In society, there are a lot of women raising boys. A woman can't teach a boy how to be a man, only a man can.

Fathers play a real vital role in a young male's life. Some fathers run from their responsibility. Don't get me wrong: some fathers are there for their sons.

Me, I plan to be an important role model in my son's/ daughter's life. That's just me. I can't speak for everyone, though. Some people aren't going to be strong fathers, and that's being real.

-Diddy B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: We agree with everything you said, Diddy, but we wonder why so many fathers run from that responsibility you talk about. Do you think most young men who do not stick around came from families where their own fathers also didn't stick around? Are they just perpetuating a pattern of behavior (or misbehavior)? Is there anything that can be done to improve this picture — to teach young men how to avoid pregnancy in the first place, and if that doesn't work, how to be responsible fathers? What kind of support would help to reduce this problem?

Camp

I just got to Camp yesterday. I feel hella good, because I saw my family today!

I got a temporary release to the dentist, and then I went home. I saw my dad, mom, brothers, and the most special person in my life — my beautiful girlfriend, Yvette. I missed her so much!

As soon as she heard that I was home, she went to my house. She made me feel very happy, because I hadn't seen her in a month and a half! They made a little party for the couple of hours I was there.

Man! I miss my family already! I just hope that I get to go home on the weekend. Tomorrow is visiting, but I doubt that I will get a visit. My mom is staying at home because she just got surgery yesterday; so she is all hurt.

I am really happy to be in Camp rather than in Juvenile Hall, because we get to go home on the weekends. I really hope that I never ever have to stay here on the weekends, because the outside world is the beautifullest place! You never even notice that until you go home and realize that you are going to have to come back to Camp.

I hate to see my girlfriend cry when I have to leave her all alone once again. I hate leaving my family, but that's how it has to be. Because if you do the crime, you have to pay the time! That's what my girlfriend always says.

Today she asked me to promise her that I was never ever going to leave her again. I promised her, but it is hard to stay out of trouble. I hope that I never have to go to anybody's jail, because I hate being locked up. I will try my very best to stay out. Peace out.

-Raul, 150 Crew

From The Beat: That first visit home is something special. It's very cool that your family made your brief visit into a little party. You are loved! Avoid write-ups and you'll go home, but if you do get restricted one weekend — don't lose your cool. Keep your eyes on the prize! Everyone says they'll try to stay out, but you need to change what you do and who you do it with, too.

Who Really Cares?

Who really cares about me?

Who really cares if I live or die?

Who really wants to see me succeed?

Who cares if I cry?

Who really cares about my feelings?

Who cares that I don't care about my life?

Does anyone believe that one day I will be someone?

Do they even want me to reach that level?

Why don't they talk to me on the level that I am at?

Instead, they want to act like I am in elementary.

But anyway...

Who really cares?

That's the question

You want to know the answer?

No one.

Care for yourself.

-Stagalee B5, SF/YGC

From The Beat: Of all the sad lines in this sad poem, the one that is the saddest is this: "Who cares that I don't care about my life?" Because if you don't care about your life, can you be surprised that others don't either? But are you really being real? If you didn't care about your life, why would you cry? Why would you even want to reach another level? We think you do care about your life, Stagalee, and that is all to the good. Of course you must care for yourself, but don't be so sure that others don't care for you, too. For example, we care...

Young Gato Back in the Hall

What's up? This is me, young Gato, back in the Hall again. I messed around and caught a case on my home pass from Camp last weekend.

Now I'm just kickin' it. My lil' brother, Nelson, just got released from the Hall to a group home. And now I'm back in this place, stuck between these closed-in walls and this door that's locked.

To all at Camp, be coo' and don't mess up like me; because I don't know what's going to happen. I know I'm being charged with assault with a deadly weapon and bodily injury.

My lil' cousin, Shorty, came in with me, and the other homies went to Rita. The cops came kickin' in my door with dogs and all. They took me right in front of my familia — and that ain't coo'.

So to all in here, stay up; keep it coo'. This is Gato's out for now.

-Young Gato, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's sad when you have to teach by your bad example, but it shows heart to tell the truth on yourself and let the homies know the way not to go. Maybe when your case is all settled you can tell us more about what happened, and what you could have done to handle the situation differently. Meanwhile, keep your head up and hope for the best.

**The cops came kickin'
in my door with dogs
and all. They took me
right in front
of my familia**

Don't You?

My life in jail ain't cool. I've been in and out of this Hall for a long time now, and it's just making me mad.

I hope one day that I can do my thang and stay out of here, so I can live my life. I know that me, myself and I — can make it in life! You feel me?

But in about five years from now, I think that I'm going to raise a good family, have some kids and take real good care of them, and get me a good job so I can stay out of trouble.

But I know it's all in my heart if I really want to do that. And if I don't do all of that, I just might go to the pen' — or be dead.

I really don't want to think too much about that, but if I did go to the pen', I would just get me a book and read so I could learn something for myself. And I'd work, too.

But that's about all I have to say about that. On the real, I just hope everything works out for me. Don't you?

-Richard, 150 Crew

From The Beat: When you're released, there will be a war in your heart, because you're addicted to that street life — but you also want to do right and truly make it in life. To accomplish that, you need to start now. Get your high school diploma or your GED. Get that first job and show up every day. How do you do it and stick to it? In your heart, feed the right and starve the wrong.

Last Twenty Minutes Free

it's kinda funny
when you spend your last twenty
minutes with your lovely honey
because when the popo
take you away from her pad
you're feeling like a dummy
while you' on your way to the hall
you can tell you wanna cry
'cause your nose is getting runny
and you can also tell
that you really love your girl
because not only do you
feel it in your heart
you feel it in your stummy
or should i say stomach
but i'm glad i got to give
a good long hug and kiss goodbye
i hope to see the one i love real soon

-Lil' Scooby, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We've heard of tummies, but stummies! Yet we don't mean to sound gummy, 'cause your poem is on the money. The question is when you next see her, will you know how to stay free with her or return to doing what got you burned? She deserves someone not on his way to prison. It's your decision.

**I'm not trying to hate on
the hustlers out there,
but selling drugs ain't
the way-out.**

In Or Out

What's right from wrong, is just like being in or out. It would be right to be out. It would be wrong to be in.

Being out, means to me, doing what I want to do. Take a dump when I want to take a dump. Go to sleep when I want to go to sleep. Wake up when I want to wake up. Eat when I want to eat.

But man, to me, being in, means using someone else's underwear; seeing the same people over and over (all guys); using the phone with someone else telling when I can use it; not getting pulled down by any girls; not being able to talk to the girls at ten p.m. and not stop talking until three a.m.; not being able to talk to my homies about the guy we just dumped, or talk about the girls that we all been through, or talk to my sister about the girl's problem that I have and how to make a girl do what you want them to do.

But this is my new life style for the next thirty-five days that I got. Like I said, this is my first time here. And, for my mom and dad — my last time. But man, that's what I get!

-Lil' Ferny, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We understand that you mean "out" is the right place to be, while "in" is the wrong place to be. So, do you think your ideas about what's right to do and the wrong to do when you're out, is got you in? Did you get locked up for doing something wrong, or for something you thought was right? You need to think through what's right and wrong in what you do.

**while you' on your
way to the hall
you can tell you
wanna cry
'cause your nose is
getting runny**

Wrong to Sell Drugs

I think it's wrong to sell drugs, because they are selling poison — and they know it!

The reason why I think this, is because many people die from drug abuse. If there weren't so many people using drugs, there wouldn't be so much violence out there on the streets.

I'm not trying to hate on the hustlers out there, but selling drugs ain't the way out. There's a lot of things you could do to get money other ways.

But no matter how good of a hustler you are, someday you're going to get caught — and it's not worth it! I'm biolincuaz. There's a difference. Gracias.

-Biolincuaz, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Yes, people die from drug abuse, not just by overdosing — but by violence. And if the drug hustle doesn't lead to death, it leads to prison. So many smart people keep making so many stupid decisions!

Changing My Life

i need help
with changing my life
transforming my mind
to enhance knowledge
by doing things that's right

i need help
with throwing in the towel
of non-stop violence
by turning positive
to the max volume
turning down
negative to
silence

i need help
with staying committed
to a sinless soul
by staying in school
to reach my ultimate goals

i need help
with staying with god
instead of the devil
an' hope to make the right choice
so i can rest in peace
at that heavenly level

-Antonio, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Look for progress not perfection. Build positive habits day by day and keep moving in that direction. Turn your back on the devil in daily life, 'cause your poetry's at that higher level already. All right? And your rhymes are tight.

Wrong By Law

I don't think it's wrong to sell drugs, because it put' money in your pocket. But the law always going to think it's wrong, because they think when people be on drugs, they commit crimes, and sometimes it be crimes as serious as murders.

I'm in here for selling drugs. I never thought that I was going to end up in here! If I could go back in time, I would never sell drugs. When I get out, I don't even want nothing to do with drugs, because I want my freedom, so I can be with my mom and family.

I just want God to forgive me for selling drugs. I tell God every night to give me one more chance to go back home, and I will never sell drugs again, or do nothing that's going to get me back in this place! I hope God hears me. And God, please be with me court, so I can get out of this place.

To everybody: do not sell drugs. If you need money, work.

-Diego, 150 Crew

From The Beat: If you truly don't believe selling drugs is wrong, why would you ask for God's forgiveness? Or is it that you think the only thing wrong with selling drugs is that it is against the law, so you are asking God's forgiveness for breaking the law? If that's the case, it sounds like you've learned your lesson. Just do what you say, and you'll be okay.

I Need / I Want / I Think

I need — help with doing things that are right. Because those are some of the things that are good for my body and mind.

I want — to help explain about people that sell drugs and the reason that they sell them. The reason people sell drugs, is because they need money to take care of their families. The reason most people are forced to sell drugs, is because there are not enough jobs and work for a lot of people.

I think — that there should be more activities made available to youth. Then maybe there will be less trouble for youth to get into. There should be more after-school programs and more jobs for us.

-Young M, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You do a terrific job of breaking down the problem and offering a solution, not just for yourself but for troubled youth in general. Props! Meanwhile, lacking these additional programs and opportunities, how can you help yourself do good things and stay out of trouble?

I was left on my own with no type of dad at all

I Am My Uncle's Son

I was fortunate growing up, to have my uncle take me in as his own son, being that my biological father moved to Arizona at a very young age. Because of this, it broke my heart when my uncle passed away last year.

I was left on my own with no type of dad at all. As you grow older, you realize how important a father figure is. So, I had to search for the right male figure to look up to and learn from, because I am still a young man whose knowledge is limited.

When I am released from Juvenile Hall, I look forward to moving in with my older brother. I trust in him, and I know he will not steer me the wrong way. I know that he will look out for me, teach me all he can to make me a strong young man.

-Brandon, 150 Crew

From The Beat: You may be a young man with limited knowledge, but you have a wise heart. Even though it broke when your uncle passed away, your heart understood the importance of having a father figure who would teach and guide a young man who is willing to try. Stay strong.

My Mom's Boyfriend

Growing up in my life, I had a father figure until I was eight years old. My father left me, and came back when I was thirteen, and left again.

So when I was growing up, I had to look up to my brothers, until my mom got this boyfriend that I had problems with in the beginning. But now our relationship is good and we get along very well.

Now I respect him, because my mom loves him, and he is not abusing my mom. He was trying to teach me right from wrong, but I didn't realize that until I got in here. So that's why I look up to my mom's boyfriend.

-Charé, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Having a father and losing him, then regaining him only to lose him again, is rough! Small wonder you weren't anxious to have this man fill your father's role. But it sounds like your mom's boyfriend is a good man who cares about your mother and about you, too. If he was trying to teach you right from wrong — that's big! Props to you for seeing it.

Let's Do The Right Thing

It's right to show love
By listening, respecting, offering advice
Why don't we do it more often?
Why do we think of the "right way" to live
When it feels like it's too late
as we sit in the Hall waiting to hear from mom
The judge, PO, or our soul mate?
Hopefully most of us have the strength
To take our words to the streets
And be positive examples to our community
That is plagued with wrongs
Wrong living, meaning
Carrying guns, selling drugs
Hating, hating, hating
Disrespecting ourselves and not knowing
'Cause we're too high, too arrogant
Shhhh, we know it all, or so we think
That's wrong, we pushing others away
Probably those who love us, too
We're so wrong for hurting ourselves
And our loved ones and acting like it's alright
Bullshhhh!
We stupid!

-Being Smart, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Excellent thinking and writing. Why do you think so many folks seem to be stuck in the negative lifestyle you describe? Your mind seems to be set on getting on a more positive tip, but what actions will it demand from you? If you or another youngsta was given a job so you didn't have to sell dope, do you think you or they would have turned out differently? We like the way you're trying to educate your people, and we really hope you can follow through and be a positive example in your community.

I guess some people deserve to die. Killers shouldn't be on the streets, they shouldn't be our president either.

Nothing Wrong Is Going On These Days

Selling drugs is the same thing as the people selling cigarettes. They're killing thousands of people every year to get rich. Yes, it's wrong to sell drugs, but why aren't the people selling cigarettes going to jail for murder?

People are going to do drugs whether you sell them or not, so you might as well get some of the money if you really have a reason. Some people have to support their families with and it's the only way. It's not right, but it's how money was made since money was invented at the cost of other people's health and lives since slavery.

And it's not right to murder. What about the death penalty and war? I guess some people deserve to die. Killers shouldn't be on the streets, they shouldn't be our president either.

-Young Tip, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Very interesting point. But fact is cigarettes are legal and illegal drugs remain illegal drugs. It sounds unfair and hypocritical but you have to realize that. When you are released, how can you make sure that you don't play a part in a role that will get you incarcerated? How do you think the death penalty is different than street deaths?

Think About It

I think sellin' drugs is a way of life because me, I sell drugs to put clothes on my back, buy my little brothers everything they want, pay bills, etc., and that's basically the reason for everybody.

Robbing people is kind of bad and kind of good because for somebody that has nothing and never had something, it's okay, but the reason it's bad is because what if the table turns and you get robbed? You wouldn't feel so nice.

I think if everybody thinks shhhh out first and just stops reacting so fast, shhhh will be different. For example, I got three friends that did a murder and right now everyone is doing over 30 years, but I bet if they could rewind time and think about it, they wouldn't have done it.

-Reggie, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Well thought out and well-written piece, Reggie. But what if someone taught you how to get a good job? A good enough job that you can buy your little brothers everything they want, pays bills, etc. — would you take the job or keep selling? You sound like a smart young man, are you willing to explore all of your options before just falling back into selling drugs? By the way, do you think your brothers would rather have a bunch of stuff or you at home instead of being locked up?

Come Friday, I'm Free!

What up, readers of The Beat:
Today I took my GED
Come Friday, I'm free
Come Friday, I'll be released
Don't ask me if I passed
The results will be mailed to me in 3-6 weeks
I studied hard
I did what I needed
Now my time here
Is completed
No more smokin' weed
This system I will beat
Doin' good by keeping busy
Going to college to further my studies
What up to Kreepy Krawler
Hang in there
Eventually you'll smell
Free air
Much love to the women
Who have been hurt and beaten
Don't let guys push you around
Stand up for yourselves
Be proud
Mad props to Broken Glass
Layin' it down
For that I give you
The Golden Crown
Peace to everyone
I will not be back
I'm goin' ta find myself a girl
With a nice lookin' back

-Ocho Morsas, Marin

From The Beat: Great, wonderful poem, Eight Whales. You've become an accomplished poet during your time in Juvy. You've always had an optimistic attitude, which can be difficult to sustain in Juvy. Best of luck to you. We hope being in Juvy has shown you another look at life. We hope you enjoyed it, learned from it, and graduated from it for good, so you'll never have to go back!

He Say/She Say

I hate when ninjas judge me, feel me! 'Cause ninjas be off that "higher an' above"! You know, that "I wanna be a BG to the next ninja, so I'm gon' cover my tracks up with the next ninja's name." Or else ninjas wanna play investigator and find Cell ain't neva been a snitch — but then they wanna start assumin' thangs!

They say, "Snitches can't live long," but I guess the assumers be under. Well, I'm gon' put it out there, feel me? Assumers is somewhat part of the cycle, so the same I guess goes to you! But you type of ninjas gon' learn a lesson, feel me? 'Cause life's full of lessons.

But don't be curious, feel me. 'Cause you might sniff too far down the line to the point where it's, "Did this ninja snitch or did he not?" And then you find out the real — that the vibe you was puttin' on a ninja, feel me, that test result was negative! So, now you tell me what happens to the assumer? Feel me, the false snitch.

But now I learned a lesson, too. Well, not a lesson, but what happened just made my insight stronger, you know. And that's to not put too much trust into ninjas you do yo' thang wit'. But wait — it supposed to be the ones you do yo' thang wit' that you can trust! But you ain't really thinkin' of it as "trust."

It's the fact these the ninjas I did this wit'. So, them ninjas don't want the consequences as well as me, feel me? So ninja is solid, you know. Ninjas ain't gon' break the ice.

But then somebody get caught and go bad; then start puttin' dirt on other ninjas to cover thei' tracks. Ninjas switch up. And now the ice got a crack in it. Then ninjas start speakin' on thangs, feel me; tryin'a prove thei'self to the next ninja, and put it on thick! So that trash get around.

But in Oakland, ain't nothin' that ain't been said or done. So ninjas ain't really on it. But after it get around, feel me, the ice starts to crackin' into different pieces. And those different pieces represent everybody who was in the situation. So then one piece, feel me, the ninja that was speakin' and made thei'self hot, well, now that piece is meltin', feel me.

Ninjas start to panic, and so now you got water in the crack affectin' everybody who was supposed to have been there. But just 'cause that one ninja broke the ice, everybody that's real ain't gon' follow his ways, feel me. So whoever that person put it on, he is confused but still solid, feel me. He ain't gon' let his part of the ice get sucked in by panickin' — so he ride the trash out.

But he left wonderin' where this shhh come from. So then staff told Cell what ninja's goin' through, and askin' why Cell's in here. So Cell is confused and not knowin' where this shhh is comin' from, feel me. 'Cause this some came-out-of-nowhere type shhh.

-Lil' Cell, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We've been thinking about having "rumors" as a topic. We print many pieces on the unreliability of rumors and on the danger rumors pose to the people being talked about. If people are talking about you, with false rumors, small wonder you're confused! And when rumors are pure fiction, fabricated to protect the rumor-maker, how can you defend yourself — when you don't even know what lying accusations are floating around about you? Know yourself, keep your head up, tell the truth, and ignore the talk; 'cause you can drive yourself crazy trying to figure out who said what and why. Rumors take on a life of their own. But they also suddenly die, disappear, and are forgotten forever, when they are built on a foundation of lies. Stay strong, hold on, and the truth will out. Don't trip about.

A Word From Sad Eyes

Smooth golden brown skin

Dark mysterious eyes

I stay petrified

In the look you give

That causes me to sin

Then I find myself

Asking our Father to forgive

You know it's all part of the life we live
Sometimes it's hard to see the difference

To see right from wrong

Until all happiness is gone

But stay strong

You can find it again

Ask for forgiveness

Do good and our Lord

Will fulfill your wish

And that's my advice

For a firme life

Alratos

-Sad Eyes, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Lovely poem Sad Eyes. Who is drawing you to sin with his eyes? If you know somebody is leading you he wrong way, do you know that someday you'll have to retrace your steps and go the right way? The further you go down the wrong path, the longer, the farther you'll have to travel back. What is the right way for you? What appeals to you about the right way?

My Solution

How silently she creeps

Beyond the labyrinth walls

"Life is strange when you're a stranger"

She hears herself recall

Like a marionette

She dances through the maze

She waits for her winter

To turn to a spring haze

She says the world is sick

And twisted beyond care

There is no God

There is no justice

And that rarely life is fair

"Life is strange when you're a stranger"

Don't you think?" she said

Perhaps it's so

And if it's true

The strangest ones are me and you

Take my advice

And put to rest

The torment of

your ignorance

For I fear

That is the only salvation

I can dream of here

-Elsa, Marin

From The Beat: You're an amazing poet, Elsa. Where did you get your beautiful images? What has happened to you or you to think that life is strange and that the world is sick? Do you think you're strange? Do you think that the strangeness of life has given you any exceptional insights, strengths or talents to deal with it?

**Do not put too much
trust into ninjas you do
yo' thang with**

My Point Of View

What a night!
 What a day!
 Lights so bright
 Skies so grey
 Liquid stars
 turn into dust
 As burning embers
 turn to lust
 Falling rainbows
 Black typhoons
 Sinking dreams
 Dying tunes
 Children smiling
 happy faces
 Fooling the world
 with all their graces
 Screaming birds
 Rotting flesh
 Lies in herds
 Colors mesh
 Bugs along
 cathedrals creep
 Waiting for secrets
 for God to keep
 Minds twisting
 Courage lost
 Eyes misting
 At no cost
 Live today
 and die tomorrow
 For all in the end
 is filled with sorrow

-Elsa, Marin

From The Beat: Fabulous poem, Elsa. You've created, or recreated, a nightmare world in which all effort seems futile. Even your children aren't innocent, they're fooling the world. Where did you get this vision of the world? Do you always feel this way? What is your world like on the outs, that it has impressed you like you write in your poem?

Judgment Day

When my day comes, I want to be able to see my name in the Book of Life with no other bad things by my name — so that I will not have to die with a bad soul.

And another thing is that I want to get it right with my mom and my family so I can sleep with a good frame of mind. Then I can wake up and greet the coming day with good things in my mind and soul.

I want to stand on my own two feet, facing both the good and the bad times in my life, but I still hope to have my body cleansed spiritually with the Lord my God. And that's my Judgment Day. But until then, I'm going to start changing my life. I'm out.

-Lil' Pooh, 150 Crew

From The Beat: In eternity, there is no time — so every day is judgment day. And today you have cleansed your soul with remorse for the bad you've done and a commitment to changing your life from now on. Every journey begins with a first step — so with this first step, your new life has begun. A new day has come.

**Pain
 going
 through
 my body
 when
 I went
 through
 that car
 window**

I Talk And He Listens

I always seem to come to you
 In the midst of rage or fear
 Having no one else to turn to
 I depend on you for an ear
 The devil always chases me
 In any way, shape or form
 I'm like a man lost in a battle
 Wondering what I'm living for
 Although I've never seen your face
 I don't care about the complexion of skin
 'Cause it's you that lifts me from the flames of hell
 That burns me in this world I live in
 When life gets too hard, I call out to you
 Verbally or in meditation through mind
 You rarely reply when I want you to
 But you never fail to be on time
 Who listens to me?

-Brian, Virginia

From The Beat: This is beautiful. Who is it you are talking about? Being heard sometimes means being a good listener yourself and finding that right person. Many people have fear of revealing themselves for different reasons like fear of being judged or having difficulty in trusting people. Think about how and why you may alienate yourself from others. There are many people in this world and you will find that friend one day who listens. Until then, keep going back to the one who listens and listen to yourself, too.

RJP Baby Sister

my name is isaiah
 and my sister died
 in nineteen ninety-six
 i really miss her so much
 i be thinking about her
 every day when i'm in jail
 and i wish i never was here
 at juvenile hall
 it makes me think more
 about her and about
 freedom and about my family
 and more things i need
 to stay strong in my life
 and to achieve my goal
 peace to all of y'all

-Isaiah, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Being locked up makes you think of all the things you miss most, like your baby sister that's gone and your family that's going on for a time without you. Keep your head up. Stay strong.

How I Feel

The streets to me is like boxing to Tyson
 A man without paper is nothing when you're writing
 A song without a beat, I can't relate
 Like many birthdays without my mom,
 it's a party without cake
 Pain going through my body when I went through that car window
 Relaxation to my mind when I' smokin' that Indo
 The code that I live by
 I'm 'a die one day by a car or plane or ship, only God can say
 I watch time go by from September to September
 Locked down on all them birthdays
 Even though I'm the Ghost, my body locks down
 My mind will always be free
 As long as I maintain
 My poetry will always be deep
 Holla at the Ghost

-Ghost, Virginia

From The Beat: Those are some sweet, creative lines. So you've missed many birthdays with your loved ones, huh? How have your habits (like smoking, shady friends and a painful past) made you want to escape and keep you out of focus and away from loved ones? You think about death and you are so young. How come? How can you lessen the chances of an early death? Finally, how can you be truly mentally and physically free?

Strugglin' Again

This is Lil' Mousy and this homeboy is strugglin' again, because my dad is in prison. So is my brother. And I'm in here in the Hall.

But I sometimes imagine how my mom feels, because every one of her kids is in jail, except my brother, Louis, who is in a group home. I feel sorry for my mistakes. Sometimes it's enough to make a strong man want to die. I sometimes think I will never get out.

What's up Green Eyes and Gato and Spooky! I don't know you guys but I read you in The Beat and I've heard a lot about y'all from Lil' Chucky aka Nelson before he went to his group home.

But I am in hell and stressed out. The Beat's over now and I got to go, but thank you, Beat, for coming.

-Lil' Mousy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Your mother needs you to get through this, and more than get through it — learn something from this terrible time. That I-don't-care life style, all wild and full of mistakes, has got to stop! For your mother's sake, don't continue in the footsteps of your father and your brothers. If they love you, they'll want better for you, too — but that part's up to you!

tryin'a
show
those
that's
clueless
how to do
this

I Need Help

with my back
it really bothers me
it bugs me all the time
there hasn't been a day
that it hasn't gotten to me
i have it in my mind all of the time
the problem is i can't see it
i always get nervous
when something is following me
that i can't see

-Brent, 150 Crew

From The Beat: This reads like a riddle or a joke, but if we take it seriously as a metaphor, it's no laughing matter: a part of ourselves we cannot see and cannot escape. Our vulnerability?

Strugglin' In The Hall

What's up, this is Lil' Mousy from 150 Crew. I'm new, but some of y'all might know me. I'm from Livermore.

First off, I wanted to say what's crackin' to Lil' Chucky. Do good in your group home. And Green Eyes, I don't know you but I read you in The Beat and I heard that you ain't stupid. So keep your head up.

Me, I'm hella strugglin' in the Hall. This is my first time here. My court date is soon, but I know I ain't gettin' out. I mean, I hope I do, so I could kick it with the homeboys — but I don't think so.

I'm sad 'cause I lost a homeboy. And I've lost too many people in this world. RIP my homeboy Sunny, Auntie Maria, Grandma Ida, Uncle Mark, cousin Cecilia.

For my homegirl, Erika from San Jose, this is Ronnie, write me back in The Beat about how you're doing here and keep your head up. And to all my homeboys, keep your head up.

I'm only a young teen, but I been through a lot and I've seen a lot. My dad, Big Mousy, is an OG, but he is in prison; and my brother Jesse aka Slurpa, is in prison, too — I love them both.

I feel like I'm goin' crazy. I need someone to write to me while I'm in here and to give me advice. Everyone write back in The Beat. Late.

-Lil' Mousy, 150 Crew

From The Beat: It's terrible to be in here as a young teen, but you're in a unit where you should be cool — if you can stay chill and be calm. Just take it day by day, and don't think about how long it's gonna be. Just think about how it's gonna be okay, if you can just be okay today! Keep writing about how you feel. And when you read The Beat, remember, even a stranger may be writing exactly the words you need to hear, 'cause everybody on lockdown feels pain and fear.

Just An Excerpt

my flow slice like a knife
right to ya windpipe
have ya stutterin' and speechless
i'm fillin' up bleachers
watch how i eat this verse
just an excerpt
from my many works
tryin'a show those that's clueless
how to do this
it's usually exclusive
but i feel i got to prove this
don't get ya hopes up
ya not raw
matter of fact
put ya hopes to the ground
i'm just tryin'a throw down
some of the best lines ya ever saw
the bay known for greatness
and now this
my lyrical prowess
will leave ya drowning
in the presence of the rap messiah
start bowing
all the stolen flows
have ya sounding
like a bootleg compilation
ain't no hesitation
words ain't got no expiration
so i spit inspiration
the instigation
is like instant hatin'
why waste time debatin'
when i could be originatin'
some verbalization

-T-Money, 150 Crew

From The Beat: A messiah has come to lead everyone of the younger generation in the hip-hop nation to a higher ground, where sound and music meet meaning — but then looks can be deceiving! 'Cause if lyrics lack liberation's spirit, then the most amazing flow is but a pyro-technical manifesto blazing like fireworks on Independence Day, to illuminate a dark sky for a minute then sink back in it. But if you're the rap messiah as you claim, you'll bring revelation to a depressed and over-stressed brains, 'cause time's wasting while freedom's waiting — and a rap messiah's got to save people from hating.

I sometimes
imagine
how my
mom feels,
because
every one of
her kids is
in jail.

Logan And Enesto's Page

The Pain Of Drugs

Drugs cause harm
And I do not care if they grow in a special farm,
Do you know what drugs do?
They will take over you,
What do you think your parents will do,
As they look at your casket and cry for you?
All it takes is one mistake,
And your parent's hearts may break.
Do you want them to feel that pain?
Because lost love is what you will gain,
I know what some of this feels like
It goes in my heart like a spike,
I know I love my family,
And so can you.

-Logan, Durango/Maricopa, Arizona

From The Beat: You write about a reality in life. People who use drugs can come up with all kinds of excuses to justify their actions, but someone always gets hurt. And it is usually those closest to us. When your loved ones are not there for you because of an addiction, how can you get the support, love you need? That's a great metaphor: drug being a spike in your heart. Good writing.

Why?

Why do people kill?
Does it mean they are very ill?
Why do they take away our loved ones?
Maybe they were sad
Maybe his parents treated them bad
Did their parents know it was affecting the way they thought?
Is that why they fired that shot?
That thought makes me sick
Just cause they were not the favorite pick
Is it that they held their anger in too long?
And instead they used it for doing wrong?
Talking it out is always good
They could have been better as soon as they understood
I wish people got along
Like standing around a fire and singing a song
So if you feel upset
Tell your parents so that you don't do something that you will regret
Talk it out
And do not pout
It will be fine
And I will see next time

-Logan, Durango/Maricopa, Arizona

From The Beat: Good thinking and good writing, Logan, this is an important reminder to all of us. As you say, don't hold your emotions in. Talk about them before your pain has a chance to take control of your life. Is this what you do? How did you learn this lesson? Has someone ever hurt you by holding in their pain and anger?

Life

Life is a lie inside my eyes
I don't know why I try to stay alive
I tried to realize the reality . . . my mind
Sometime I just want to die
To get over with life
I tried my hardest to survive, but . . .
I only could cry inside my mind
So
I did drugs to try to face life

-Ernesto, Durango/Arizona

From The Beat: We're so sorry to hear that life is such a painful experience for you, Ernesto. How long have you felt like this? Is there anyone you can turn to who will listen to you, who cares, who will encourage you and hold you when you feel like the pain is more than you can handle? If you don't have someone like this, keep looking and take advantage of the folks in the Hall. As you know, drugs may take you away from the pain momentarily, but when you come off the high, the pain is waiting for you. What brings you pleasure and peace in your life besides drugs?

My Test

I had a girl on chest
And she was the best
But then she put me through a test
So I did my best
But she just got up and left
Before I finished the test
I guess she found out that I was a gangbanger
I guess she didn't want to go through the stress again
She wanted the best
Not a guy that will get put to rest.
All of us are going to have a test
Sometime in life
And this was my test

-Ernesto, Durango/Maricopa, Arizona

From The Beat: We like the way you acknowledged this young woman for the choice that she made, expressed an understanding as to why she made the choice to leave, and did not "dis" her for her choice. Wow! You are obviously open to others needs and wants. A sign of maturity! Do you want to have a life with a young woman who wants a man who will be around for her beyond his teens/twenties? If so, can you imagine taking whatever actions you must to make this a reality? Do you ever imagine what life beyond the gang would be like?

Learn

Do you like school?
Or do you go to see your friends and act cool?
We all should like learning 'cause
In life that gets you your earnings
School is a good place to be
Not on the streets making people bleed
If there is something you want to know
Then school is where you should go
If you use drugs you become dumb
They make you even forget where you're from
School is a helpful tool
If you don't go there you are a fool
You can't pretend to be smart
But you can learn in order to be smart
Start learning for an earning

-Logan, Durango, Maricopa/Arizona

From The Beat: Logan, it sounds like you have a love for learning. How can you influence others with your love for learning? How can you use this to develop the strength you need to stay free? What do you think is the most important thing you can learn right now in your life?

Why Don't You Try To Understand My Life?

Why doesn't anybody like me?
Why do you act like you care?
Why don't you try to understand my life?
Are you scared I might take over your mind or your life?
But why are you scared?
I am not a monster coming after you.
So please take time to understand me
Before you judge me.
If you don't know,
Or don't care,
Don't lie to me
And act like you care
When you really don't give a shhh about me.
That way I am going crazy in this place
Because you are lying to my face,
Breaking promises,
And even breaking my heart.
But what you really don't know
Is that I am a human being, can't you see?
I'm really trying to exceed my dreams
So that I won't end up on the street
Or six feet deep.

-Ernesto, Durango/Maricopa, Arizona

From The Beat: It sounds as if you have been hurt in past relationships. Sadness and anger, we can feel these emotions when someone we love betrays us or does not do what they say they will do. Whenever you open up to others you take a risk, but keep taking the risk. With pleasure comes some pain. Sometimes people who really do care get distracted by the business of life and need to be reminded that you feel ignored and/or not a priority in their life. Don't expect others to just know how you feel. Keep reaching out to others.

I Need Help

I need help with love and finding the right place,
'Cause the hurt and pain I can't erase,
It's hard to trust but I do what I can,
But every perpetrator seems to be a man,
Raped and abused by the men I loved the most,
Men I didn't think to watch close,
Enemies in mind I kept close to my eye,
But those were the ones that failed to leave me behind,
I need help with the emotions,
I can't seem to control the hurt,
I still have that,
No one seems to know,
I want to be loved right where there's no room for wrong,
But my hope for that love has up and gone
I love myself and my baby now,
But I still need help with love somehow.

-Imay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Imay, you are a brave woman. You are brave to ask for help and you are brave to share your feelings and experiences so openly. There are many women readers out there who have similar experiences. Asking for help is one of the greatest gifts a person can give oneself, and is one of the first and most important steps to changing yourself. You deserve the love you dream of. And it looks like you are on the road to creating it.

**always push forward
and give it your all**

I'm A Parent Now (Part 1)

Turnin' movin' and grovin',
I can feel inside,
The side of a tiny pea,
Growing inside of me,
Wakin' up all times of the night,
Damn! I got to pee, I'm hungry...alright?
You want to know if I'm cool,
I say yeah, then ask about you,
All y'all got suggestions of the fate of my child,
But I'm the parent now.

-Imay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Imay you are a strong lady. From what we read, the struggle of pregnancy while incarcerated is hard. We are strong in heart with you and know that you will be a great mom!

I'm A Parent Now (Part 2)

I know you're in there I hope you're growing strong,
Let me tell you 'bout this cruel world,
And the things you think you're missing,
The hate, betrayed and the killing,
This world is slowly turning on itself,
And the lost women have lost children left to find
their way,
But today, I'll try to break the chain
And hope you'll be ok.

-Imay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: We like how you kept this poem short but within it holding a strong message of how history repeats itself. We believe you can do better, you will break that chain! Great piece!

Imay's Page

Life

How can life unfold in so many ways?
To be on the right path and fall astray,
I close my eyes and things fall apart,
Not even I know the way to my heart,
Changing colors,
Changing faces,
I'm so young but been so many places,
I can't deny I got scared sometimes,
But I put down my fear in lyrics and rhymes,
All the love and hurt that grows inside,
Some comes out with nowhere to hide,
You can't escape from yourself and who you are inside,
What makes you and what offends your pride?
Life is the forever-changing ocean,
And the only way out is to learn the motion.

-Imay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Thanks for sharing with us how you ride the ups, down, twists and turns that life brings to each of us. One question: how can you dive down deeper to hear the true ways of your heart, and let that guide you?

To My Little Princess

Hey my little princess I want you to stand strong. When the monsters come out the closet, do your best to hold on. Say your prayers every night and trust that it will be all right 'cause joy comes in the morning but pain is there all night.

-Imay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: These are some wise words Imay. We know you will continue to share your wisdom with your child. As long as you continue to be supportive as you are now, everything will be alright.

Little Man

Why you crying little man? Mama's here to cradle you. Now when you slip be sure to get right back up 'cause there's snakes in the grass that just don't care.

Hey little man, don't let them see you fall always push forward and give it your all. Those who are your friends are the ones we should watch close. And the ones we call enemy are the ones we need the most. Come here my little soldier take shelter under my wing when all else fails you can always come to me.

-Imay, 150 Crew

From The Beat: Imay, we like this piece. Our friends we should watch close and our enemy are the ones we need most. Really makes us think. Why do we need our enemies? Do they keep us on our toes? Do they keep us in check about our flaws? Do they humble us? What good are enemies? What do you think? Don't you think our friends are the ones we need the most? Or maybe it's our mamas. You offer good advice and really make us think.

"Right From Wrong?"

You Learn Sales As A Kid

Hey, hey now! What's the business? What's the worst? But yeah, I feel it's like this. There are many hustles in the world, and selling drugs is one — and it runs from generation to generation.

So they say if you doin' somethin' illegal and you get caught, it ain't yo' thang, feel me? But now if you brought in this world around shhh like that, as a kid, you learn it.

Then as you get older, it becomes a profession in yo' mind — and it's about that time when shhh start gettin' hard! So you like, "Forget this shhh! I 'bout to go out and get it!" Feel me? So everything you learned over the years, you put into action.

And you see the ninjas be gettin' caught up, and you be like, "Them ninjas is game goofy!" But at the same time, you' learnin' more by thei' mistakes, feel me.

So you under, doin' yo' thang. It becomes yo' mentality. So you ain't really trippin' off the police. 'Cause now, that's when haters start to take thei' place — and you get protective about your money. And then, it's about that time.

-Lil' Cell

From The Beat: You give a pretty clear picture of how so many young people find themselves lost in the game, not even knowing they're lost — 'cause, as you say, "It becomes yo' mentality." But in reality, between haters and police, it just a matter of time before 'hood disease symptoms start marking you as a victim of either the system or the street. Till you see!

Weed, Right or Wrong

some people think smoking weed is right they think it will help you other people say weed will stop you from growing people say weed will make you forget a lot but i think people should leave weed and all drugs alone go to school get a job and leave jail and the street to the people that like to do wrong i think drugs can get you killed or put you in jail but really to be real people talking about things that are not real jail is not the place

-Kevin

From The Beat: If smoking weed does not help you go to school, get a job, and stay out of jail, but has you cutting school, hanging on the spot, then going to jail — it's a no-brainer! Don't do it! And the same goes for alcohol or any other drug.

Right Is Good

Right is good and wrong is bad. But if you're like me, you'll choose wrong because it make' you look good.

To tell the truth, doing the right thing can make you look good. But I just really like doing bad, 'cause that is what I do best! Then sometimes I'll do right, to make myself feel important.

Doing right is good, but nowadays, people don't know right from wrong.

-Dirty Charly

From The Beat: We hear so many young people on lockdown claim that doing wrong is what they do best. It's like you're asleep, the alarm's ringing, and you just don't wake up!

**fast money
ain't good
money**

Who I Look Up To

I look up to my family, because they always try to tell me right from wrong. But I don't ever listen. I want to go home and be with my family — and just live happy forever.

Please, God, get me out of here. God bless everybody in the world, and especially my family. One love, Diego.

From The Beat: They say in life, pain is required but suffering is optional. You feel the pain, but if you learn a lesson from it, it's over. Fail to learn your lesson and suffer the consequences.

Make Money

I think for some people, it is coo' to sell drugs — but only if they are doing it how I was doing it.

I sold drugs to support my daughter, but the only reason why, was because I had a warrant — so that was the only way I could make money!

But if you're doing it just to do it — then that's wrong; especially if you are eligible to get a job, then it is really wrong!

-Lil' Spanky

From The Beat: It seemed like the right thing to do at the time, but really finishing your commitment to the system so you could walk away free and "eligible to get a job" is how you should have done it then — and how you need to do it from now on!

Selling Drugs

I don't think selling drugs is wrong. That's how some people got to get money to survive out on these streets.

I'm all about making money anyway it come' — but fast money ain't good money, because it either get' you killed or in jail.

I go to church every Sunday to put the Lord in my life, but I still be on the corner. I got into "high speeds", and I think I got away because of God's will. Open your eyes up, it's time for a change!

-Lil' Booda

From The Beat: Maybe it's God's will that you survive to make that change. People who know you, know you're real; and if you can change, it must be the real deal.

Hmmm?

Yes, it's right to sell drugs 'cause they have to make a living!
People that buy drugs, it's their choice to buy them!
Rob/steal is wrong!

Rape and murder is also wrong!

-Michelle

From The Beat: Michelle, you're right, it is the buyers' choice to buy drugs, but the drug game is full of violence and thievery. What do you think would happen to the drug game if drugs were legal? Why do you think crime follows drugs?

Do What You Gotta Do

Selling drugs is cool, but some people think it's not cool to do. But I do it to feed my family, you feel me?

I sell weed — that's what I do for a living. Y'all ninjas know what's up. Ninjas sell weed for a living because they do what they got to do in life.

-Little Pooh

From The Beat: Nobody is telling you not to stop trying to feed your family. We all gotta do something to maintain. But how are you taking care of your family now? They need you. Try to learn something, get somebody to teach you how to get a job so when you get out you can take care of your family with a legit job so they don't have to worry about you going back to jail. Think about that. You got caught up once, that doesn't mean that it will be your last time if you keep doing what you're doing.

Who Am I To Stop Them?

Selling drugs can be right, and it can be wrong. I don't think it's wrong if people are selling it to old people and people's moms, because if they're going to buy it — who am I to try to stop them? If my mom was smoking it, they would fight over getting the sale.

No, what I think is wrong is ninjas out there playing with the game. Ninjas who buy plug just to get high then trick thei' money off with a broad; or a ninja who is rushin' knocks today and askin' to hold somethin' tomorrow.

What I think is cool about selling drugs, is a person who is all about thei' money, pulling all-nighters on the spot, flippin' tight stuff and puttin' food in thei' mom's house — even if she do got a job.

And if you grindin' at a young age, don't have yo' mom buying you stuff! If you makin' yo' own money, why spend yo' moms money? That's called a low-life, and I don't respect ninjas like that!

-Young Hitta

From The Beat: We can understand the attraction of not depending on anyone else for money to buy what you need or want. And it must give you a rush of pride to help out your family, even if your mom is out there working a legitimate job. But you're being seduced by a game that has no heart, and it will break yours. Use this time to work toward your diploma or get your GED; then get a job that pays legitimately — and stay free!

If you makin' yo' own money, why spend yo' moms money?

Dangerous Profits

I think that it is good to sell drugs, because if you sell drugs in the right neighborhood, you can make a lot of money — and provide your family with things that they might need.

I also think that you are in danger when you're posted on your block, because you can get set up by the cops and not even know that you're being set up. You also can get jacked by some other haters that want what you got, that can't get their own.

Secondly I think that selling drugs, robbing people, and also stealing, is all right for certain people — people that need money and that's on the hustle and tryin' to get things they need and want!

But for rape and murder — that's a whole different story. That isn't coo', because you're messing somebody's life up by doing such a thing!

-Young Money

From The Beat: View the world around you with a mental time-lapse camera, and you'll see that the danger you allude to above, eventually catches up with everyone. From another angle: is there anyone to whom you would refuse to sell? A youngster? A pregnant woman? (Read your last sentence again, young friend.)

It Is Wrong, But ...

Of course it is wrong for people to sell drugs, or even use drugs.

But for some people, it is all they know — and they need to live, to survive. Yes, it is morally bad to sell drugs, but to live with bad morals is better than not to live at all.

But it is not just the person selling the drugs who has bad morals. It is also the people buying the drugs who have bad morals. And it follows, if there was no one who wanted to buy such a poison — there wouldn't be anyone to sell it.

But if you think about it, you'll realize that there will always be people that want to use drugs and are willing to pay for it. So that means — there always has to be someone to sell them their drugs.

-David

From The Beat: You make a strong argument that the problem is misconceived. But are there safer ways to sell drugs than to have gun-toting teenagers peddling them in the streets? Of course. Perhaps so-called street drugs should be as legal as liquor and pharmaceuticals — and sold at liquor stores or drug stores, under state regulation. Would youth crime still continue unabated?

Wrong and Right

What's wrong, is when you do something that you know you're not supposed to do. But you do it anyways. Or your mind tells you not to do it sometimes, but you do it anyways.

The right thing to do, is when you don't have to do nothing behind nobody's back. You can do it right in front of them. That's the right thing.

-Marcus

From The Beat: We like your definitions. They may not cover every single instance, but they are pretty darn good guidelines.

it is not just
the person
selling the
drugs who
has bad
morals

Doing Wrong For Good Reasons

Selling drugs is wrong, but most people do it for good reasons.

Put yourself in our shoes. Somebody just stole all of your clothes out of the apartment's washer. Now you have no clothes, maybe two pairs of pants that they didn't take.

Every time you ask your mom for money to go shopping, she says she has to pay bills. All she get is welfare checks anyways. So you call your dad, and he says he ain't got it, he lookin' for a job.

Growing up in poverty is rough. You do what you gotta do to maintain. I know it's people all over the world that got it way worse than us, but a ninja like me — like to be the freshest! I wanna have the stuff ain't nobody got.

So I ask you, Beat, what would you do?

-Freshest

From The Beat: You spin a good story, but is it a true story, that happened to you? For sure, there can be truth in fiction; but then at the end you admit it's not just being respectable but the freshest! It's like a short-term rush, and it doesn't mean much, when you lay it up against the rest of your life. Look where it brought you! Poverty is rough, but no excuse to mess your life up. (Some of us grew up poor, too, just like you.)

"Right From Wrong?"

My Thoughts

I don't believe it is wrong to sell drugs, because some people sell drugs to take care of their family. Some people have children and need fast money.

I'm not saying it is right, but selling drugs gets you fast money. But if the game is not for you, you will fall off. But if you stay on your P's and Q's, you won't have that problem. You will succeed.

I think only the right person can sell drugs, because most people are game goofy. I have never been caught, so I don't know what that's like. But I know people that have been caught, and it's not nice.

My man is in jail for a dope case right now, because he fell off his P's and Q's. He got off his toes. I told him, 'cause I was in here, "Don't drop your guard." But he did. And now he has to pay.

Playing this game has its advantages, but it also has its disadvantages.

-Tiny

From The Beat: Selling drugs is part of a larger lifestyle that will get you caught up for something, sooner or later, whether you watch your P's & Q's or not. You never got caught for a dope case, but here you are. It's the whole mentality of getting over on someone else for that fast money. We're not hating on families with children, but when you sell crack to someone's momma — you are!

This Life of Hell

selling rocks
at the age of twelve
why do i be livin'
this life of hell
i don't know
but i tried to live it well
one point in my life
did so much coke
i couldn't smell
smoking so much weed
my eyesight was blurry
i didn't trip though
at the sound of five-oh
i be out in a hurry
had one main female
that took away my worry

-Smoke Dog

From The Beat: That's a very strange definition of "living well" — to lose your sense of smell, and have your eyesight wasted! And you're bragging about getting away from the law, even when we all know where you now are? It's not your fault you got into that life at twelve, but why re-enlist for more time in hell?

Self-Supporting Work

Some people might think selling drugs is wrong. Other people might think it's right, because they're makin' money.

I don't think it's wrong for people that sell drugs to make money like that, because maybe that's the only way they can make some money to support themselves.

-Derty Dee

From The Beat: If selling drugs is not the only way someone can make money, then it's wrong?

Get Money

In a way, I think it's right to sell drugs. Because if you need the money, that's a way to hustle.

It's hard to get a job, and the white man don't want a brother like me to get money legally. You know? So I say, forget that! Get money the fast way! You know?

-Poppaditty pop

From The Beat: Look where that thinking got you. Don't be afraid to work hard or one day you'll be doing hard time.

Morals come
from your
heart, your
mind.

Know Right From Wrong

There's a lot to say about knowing right from wrong. There are always right decisions and wrong decisions to make.

Like me, I make right decisions and sometimes wrong. But when I make a wrong decision, it's because I ain't thinking about what I am doing. But I think there is right from wrong. Otherwise how you ever going to make a good decision.

Well, I'm out. Keep trucha and make the right decision. Stay up..

-Giggles

From The Beat: Is the right decision, the one that helps you get away? Or does it come before that, in what you choose to do in the first place? What makes something right or wrong?

Choices

Selling is not wrong, as long as the buyers know what they're buying.

It is wrong to rob one another, because the robber is taking something that doesn't belong to him; the same with stealing. Raping is wrong, because one is being forced to have sex against one's own will. Murder is also wrong, because one is taking life away.

Morals come from your heart, your mind. Some people were raised up with love and caring from their parents, so they understand that killing and stealing is just not right.

On the other hand, some people lived on the edge of society; and killing and stealing is how they survive — and that's what they feel about what's right.

So right or wrong, it's all just an opinion held from different points of view.

-V souljah

From The Beat: After making some clear arguments as to why robbing, stealing, raping and murdering, are all wrong; you strangely conclude that morality is just a matter of personal opinion, as if all opinions hold an equal claim to truth. If there is such a thing as moral understanding, rooted in love and caring, as you say, is there not also such a thing as misunderstanding? Rooted in what? Mistreatment and neediness?

"Right From Wrong?"

It's Wrong But...

I know that selling is wrong, but it's ok to sell just to feed your family, because your family has to survive and eat something.

The right thing to do is to try to get some help from a friend or a really close family member 'cause they could really give good advice on what you can do.

-Denny B1

From The Beat: Is it ok to sell for any other reason? What about robbing or stealing to feed your family? What advice would you give to a person that was in a situation where they needed money? Are there other, legal ways, to put food on the table?

Gettin' Caught Is Wrong

The way I see it, it's cool to sell drugs on the under if you there tryna support your family or your loved ones, but it's wrong when you caught. It's just the matter of you knowin' how to run thangs. If that's the case, you doing everything right.

But if you ain't knowin' what you doing then, hey why do it? See that's wrong. But rapin' ninja and killing for no apparent reason is wrong off top.

-Young Tin YTEC

From The Beat: Is there such things as a right reason to kill someone? What would it be? If a person is hustling to feed their family, should they be looking for a job at the same time? It sounds like your idea of right and wrong depends on whether you get caught for something or not, so what makes rape wrong if you don't get caught? What makes anything wrong if you can get away with it?

The Way Of Life

I feel things are wrong, but it is also the way of life for people. I feel that rape is wrong no matter what, but in the case of other things, it depends on the situation.

Some people grew up in the 'hood and learned the ways of the street and have that type of mentality. That don't make it right, but sometimes people feel that that's the only way they could get by.

-Dominic B2

From The Beat: What do you think it will take for people to realize there is another way for them? Why would people rather be on the block making bread, taking risks than be working an honest job, not worrying about getting locked up or robbed? What about you; what do you do to get by?

Is Selling Drugs Okay?

People say it's okay to sell drugs if your family is poor and no one can get a job. It is okay, but people is doing it 'cause their ninjas are doing it, so not cool. I do, but I plan to stop and go into real estate, that is where the money is — get that shhh the right way. That is my plan for when I'm about nineteen.

As for raping people, what you do will come back on you. As for murder, it will always stay with you. That is all I can say today, but in my 'hood, murders are every day. Why do the good die young? RIP to all my big homies.

-Your Friendly Real Estate Agent B2

From The Beat: Why wait until you are nineteen to be legit? What exactly are you waiting for? What is preventing you from doing all the things you need to do right now?

I'm growin' to be a man, Beat, so I have to stay strong and be positive 'cause you know, ain't nothing for a black man in those streets.

Drugs Sales

That is the wrong thing to kill and sell drugs because it hurt other people and kill. On my block my ninjas sell drugs all day and be on the block like the dirty dozen, like what is it, cousin?

-Spoon B4

From The Beat: Why do people do things they know are wrong? How much choice is involved, and how much is necessity?

It's All We Know

I'm not going to lie, it is wrong to sell drugs. But for some of us this all we know. You got to feel me 'cause that is all I know, to sell dope and make money. Shhh, all my folk grew out of this shhh. Man, we got to eat we all we got.

-Lil' Tuna B4

From The Beat: Well, sure, you got to eat all right, but you ain't stealing food, are you? Does everybody in the 'hood who's "got to eat" sell drugs? We don't think so. We feel you, but we think you still have to take responsibility for the particular choice you made. Not everybody who needs to put food on the table is selling drugs to do it.

It's Wrong

I feel it's wrong to rob, steal, rape murder. But when you're in a bad situation, when you have to do and you need that quick money right then and there, why not do those things that are not right?

My morals come from being in tough situations on the outs, no lie. I hustle any way I can from selling dope to snatching purses, that's how low I go. I can't tell you what I do is right 'cause if I did it'd be a lie, but put yourself in my place. One day you'll see why I do the things I do. Food for thought

-Eroc B4

From The Beat: Yes, there is much in this piece that is food for thought. And we can't say we wouldn't be doing the same things if we were in your shoes. But that doesn't mean we would be right, does it? Aren't there other young people in your situation (poor) who find ways to put food on the table without snatching purses, selling dope or stealing? How do they do it?

Wrong Things For Right Reasons

Sellin' drugs for some people is just the life that they grew accustomed to love. That's not to say that it's good to do it, but that's how people feed their family. But if you sellin' just to make a name for yourself then you'll just be stupid.

But I really don't judge people because there's a moral behind every story. I do it 'cause jobs nowadays ask for too much information. Not sayin' that I wouldn't want one, but it might be wrong for some people.

But the person that's doin' the bad thing is doing it for a good reason. All y'all stay up.

-Young Fatz B5

From The Beat: If you didn't have to give so much information, what kind of job would you like to do? Do you need training for the kind of work you would like to do? Do you know the expression, "The ends justify the means." Basically, that is what you believe when you write that you can do bad things for a good reason. Can you think of other examples of the ends justifying the means? Some people believe that good results don't justify bad ways of getting there. What do you say to those people?

Think

Right from wrong is basically the way you think of it. Some people see it as they would sell drugs and it is the right thing to do, and it's a quick way of get money. Some people see drugs wrong because it kills the people on the streets. I think it is wrong because it's something that get you locked up in a cage, and god didn't put us on earth to be in cages.

-Gabriel B4

From The Beat: Are there things you can do that are wrong that won't lead to a jail cell? Are there things that are right that you can go to jail for? In other words, does right and wrong depend on the consequences to you, or are some things either right or wrong regardless of the those consequences?

My morals come from being in tough situations on the outs, no lie.

My Decisions As Of 2004 - '05

Right and wrong? Doing right could be going to school, finishing school, making your family happy that you are a success. Or you could do it for yourself and be happy with yourself.

Take myself for example: I choose to play the hard role and do my thang, putting myself in a grown man's place and not minding my business and staying to myself.

Man, Beat, I've been gone for a year now, and I'm only fifteen, but live the life like I'm 21, yadidamean? I don't know why. But I do learn from my mistakes, so in the long run it would just roll off my back like water.

I'm growin' to be a man, Beat, so I have to stay strong and be positive 'cause you know, ain't nothing for a black man in those streets. So I got to do something else, something positive, yadidamean?

RIP to my big brother.

-Young Cd B5

From The Beat: You not only put yourself "in a grown man's place," you also put yourself here. So, the question is, how will you be able to grow into the man that you're becoming without giving up your body to a system that is prepared to deal with young people on the street by locking them up? Yes, doing something positive is the beginning of freedom, but what do you have in mind? Just wanting to do positive isn't enough. You have to have a real idea, a real plan to follow, as in: "First I'm gonna do this, then I'm gonna do that, then..." What's your plan?

Is There Right From Wrong

Right from wrong. Is there a right from wrong in the 'hood? If there is it's just people doing wrong. The wrong people be doing the flaunting on the street and I'm just tired of it.

-J-Boom B2

From The Beat: What do you think it will take to stop all the wrong in the streets? What wrong or wrongs are you tried of?

Gotta Do It

We all know right from wrong, but sometimes you gotta do the wrong stuff. I don't really sell drugs. I've sold 'em, but that ain't my thing. I rob people, or I did rob people. I don't do that no mo', but when I did, it was 'cause I needed to.

Stayin' wit' my friends, and my ex, I needed some way to make money, shhh I gotta eat. I ain't doin' it for fun; I'm doin' it 'cause I'm hungry 'cause I need somethin'. Sometimes I need the money so I could get a double up or somethin' so I can get enough to buy some clothes, stuff like dat.

I know what I be doin' is wrong, but I got to. I can't always depend on otha people.

-Tyree B2

From The Beat: We feel what you're saying here, but we're wondering if you really couldn't have done anything legit to make the little bit of money you needed. Did you try to pick up a little job? What about your parents, could you have gone to them, or borrow something from friends? You say you're not doing that stuff anymore. What did you find to make enough cash to get by?

It's Wrong, But. . .

It's not right to sell drugs, but that is all some people know because that is what they was raised around. That is what is in their community. They see that fast money and want it, but that's not right because some people is dying trying to sell drugs, and that is wrong.

-Ap B4

From The Beat: What do you think can or should be done in your community to let some people know there are other ways to earn money than selling drugs? What kind of job training or actual jobs would you like to see where you live that could make a difference?

Striving For The Right

Damn, I strive to do right, but the right path is hard to stay on. This is what I chose to do, so I'm going to knock it out. I can't let nothing or no one stop me. I'm out fo' tha fam. till tha end. We're all puttin' our heads together to take our futures on some "get better" type hype.

-Pg B5

From The Beat: Yes, it's hard to stay on the right path, but it's also hard to stay on the wrong path (because being locked up is hard). Just keep your prayer and your sense of regret for things past in your mind, and maybe that will make it a little easier.

Parents And Drugs

Well, if you want my opinion about selling drugs, I would not sell drugs because my mom was smoked out my whole life, since I was two or three years old! It hurt me to even think about selling drugs. Please believe it. I tried it. I could not sell it.

I still love you, mom. Yo' baby,

-Isriael B1

From The Beat: Some people watch their parents doing drugs, and they want to follow. But some people, like you, are smart enough to see the real results in the family, and make the decision not to go down the same road. We only wish that other young people were as mature as you show yourself to be in this piece.

Messed Up Life

I need help makin' and takin' the right steps in life. I need help in seeing where my life is heading if I don't stop doing what I'm doing. I need help with my studying so I can make something out of this messed-up life of mine.

-Noriega B5

From The Beat: We don't think you need help in seeing where your life is heading. You can see that clearly. You may need help in changing your direction so that you can head for something better than where you are now. What kind of help do you need in studying? Are there people in the Hall who can give you the help you need? Asking for help is the necessary first step towards getting it.

every
time I
see my
daughter,
I like get
scared.

Positive And Negative Influences

Who played the fatherly role in my life was my big brother and my grandfather. I learned a lot from them. I learned my manners from my grandpa and my street smarts from my big brother, and from my big homies when my big bra was locked up.

I grew up in my neighborhood and was taught right from wrong, so I had both negative and positive influences in my life. I'm glad that I had both because I probably wouldn't be alive right now if I didn't.

-Weasel B5

From The Beat: What do you think the most important lessons were that you learned, the ones that kept you alive? What are the lessons that you wish to forget, or at least not pass on to your own children (if and when you have children)? Is your grandfather still alive? What does he say about your current situation? What do you think you owe him? What would make him happiest from you?

My Big Influence

My mom is a big influence in my life. Sometimes I take after my dad, only sometimes when I do wrong.

But when I don't do wrong, I really take after my grandfather. That's my real dad, he do everything for me. He tell me to stop doin' what I do, but I don't take that to mind. Like my dad told me, the good die young, that's why he was never good, and that is the truth.

-Tyron B2

From The Beat: Interesting piece, Tyree. Who do you have more respect for, your dad or your grandfather? It sounds like your grandfather, and that makes us wonder why you don't listen to him. Why do you think you don't take his words to mind?

Uncle Pops

I look at my uncle as my father, because he like always treat me like a son. He was in the dope game, in jail San Quen, then he changed his life. Now he spends a lot of time with me, and I thank him for that so I can say he is my father figure.

-Lil' Carl B2

From The Beat: Now when are you going to follow in his footsteps and start changing what you are doing?

"Father Figure"

Father Play

You know it have a big effect on me when they say something about daddy figure 'cause I'm a father myself. Well I'm not even a daddy 'cause you know a daddy would at least stay with their child for a few days. As me man, I would see her for a few hours. I don't really get along with the mom.

My daughter about to be two years old. She was born on a September 2002. I get along with my daughter's grandma but it's like I wasn't ready. I love kids. I would take care of them. But every time I see my daughter, I like get scared. But you know, money wise, my daughter don't even need nothing. Every time I try to get her something, her mom yell at me like, "She don't need that," and all that.

I think about the future and say that I have to be there for my little angel, but the momma a piece of work. I can't stand her. I feel like one day takin' my little angel, but shhh ain't working for me right now. My angel is in a good neighborhood and nice city. I don't want her in the ghetto an' be disrespectful to adults 'cause the school she would be going would teach her how to be a good citizen.

I love you my little angel. To Blair Ramirez Miller.

-Slick B5

From The Beat: This is a sad story, Slick, to have a baby with a woman you can't stand. (You must have stood her at one time... What happened?) We understand wanting to snatch your little girl, but we respect you for knowing that she has things now that you can't provide, like a decent neighborhood with good schools. We think your love for her shines through in your willingness to sacrifice your own relationship with her in order not to interfere with the decent chance she's getting for a good life. Having sex is so easy; having kids is so difficult! We hope the next time you're with a young lady, you'll think about the life-long responsibility that a child represents, and we hope every other young man reads your story and thinks about the important message you're giving.

Part-Time Father

I have a father, and he's been able to supply food for the table and always been able to pay rent, but sometimes rent was late. But throughout all my life I never really had much, just enough to get by. Always been on Section 8, but the days' rent weren't paid, That's because pops took the whole welfare check and smoked it all away. I always had a father but felt he ain't never really been a figure in my life. But I'm glad he has been there.

-Jaydah B4

From The Beat: How do you think your life would have been different if your father had not been in your life? If you have children, what do you think you'll do differently than your father did with you? What will be the same?

"Father Figure"

Daddy's Little Girl

I think that fathers do play a major role because you have to be able to take care of ya kids and all, like buy diapers, bottles, milk, etc.

Well me, myself, I have a lil' daughter dat's one year old right now, and it's hard fo' me 'cause I'm not there fo' her to hear her say, "Daddy." It is also hard fo' me to be a father figure to her right now 'cause I'm locked up, but when I was there fo' her, she stayed with milk, diapers, and a lot of toys, you feel?

I just wish I didn't make the mistake I made to get myself in tha position I'm in to not be able to see my lil' mama every day like I used to, but now I'm gon see her again.

To all y'all fathers/mothers, take care of y'all responsibilities on tha one 'cause our kids need love too, nawamean? 'Til next time I holla.

-Zoomungus B5

From The Beat: We don't mean to be harsh or hating, Z, but were you thinking of your little daughter when you did whatever you did to get locked up? Was she your top priority? Because you talk about how hard it is for you not to be able to be a father to her while you're here, but you don't say how hard it is for her to be without a father. Toys, diapers, and milk are important, and good parents, fathers and mothers, provide them. But far more important than "things" is the knowledge that your dad and mom love you and will always be there for you. We hope that when you are reunited with your family, you put them above the street life, and recognize that the greatest gift you can give your child is yourself.

A Real Man

To me, a real man is someone who is not afraid of the outcome of anything. Nowadays everybody wants to do the same things: Play wit' guns, sell drugs, act tough — I repeat, act tough — lie to loved ones, and all kinds of crazy things.

But when the heat is on and somebody 'bout to catch some hard time, ninjas a sell you out like yesterday. Even yo' family. I seen it happen before and, oh boy, still up in here, Man, what goes around comes around 'cause dude lookin' at some time when he could be on his way home.

My pops once told me trust no man 'cause ninjas turn like bleach. But ninjas be havin' babies and sayin' they're not there's when it look just like them. Or they say they got kids when they know damn well they ain't got shhh.

All I got to say is man up and take responsibility.

-Young CD B5

From The Beat: How do you fit into this picture? You give excellent advice for others to follow, but what about you? Are you taking responsibility? What does it mean to "man up" to you? If you trust no man, how can you seek the help you have said you want? Could responsibility include seeking out trustworthy people to be around? Do you think such people exist?

Not Since Pops Passed Away

The father figure in my life right now is... ? I really don't have a father figure in my life. Ever since my pops passed away, I didn't try to replace him with no one. I don't know why, but that's how I feel.

I'm goin' to be just like pops and take care of my young one the same way that I was raised, but I'm goin' try to provide more since this is my only kid. He gon' have a lot because I got a lot of support from the family.

That's all that I got to say. RIP, Pops.

-Young Fatz B5

From The Beat: What would your pops be telling right now if he could? What is the most important thing you can give your own child? Is it the things you and your family can provide, or is it a steady presence, a man he can count on to be there? How long ago did you lose your pops? How did you deal with it?

Pops Left

I can say that I never had a father figure. Pops left when I was five, and I really didn't know what was goin' on. Moms was there and she played the "Pops" role.

It must have been hard for her to raise a man. I guess if Pops was there, he would have taught me the things that a father teaches his son. I think that life would have been a whole lot different!

-Noriega B5

From The Beat: It's hard to raise any child, even with all the help in the world. For a single mother to raise a child, especially with almost no help, is truly a remarkable accomplishment, and your mom deserves major props. What do you think you owe her? What "gift" do you think she wants most from you, especially now that you are separated by being locked up?

My Father Figure

Is My Father

In my life I have my biological father and he is one person I look up to because he keeps me with the right thing on my mind, even though sometimes I stray away from it. That's why I am in here.

He teaches me the way I should teach my baby that I am going to have in five months so that he/she won't have to be in this situation. He is always the one that's has been with me through everything I been through, even my first time in the halls for two months while I am 18 years old.

-Gabriel B4

From The Beat: Do you know how fortunate you are to have a real father who really acts as a father should? We hope you know, because we read so many other young people in your situation who don't have that strong male presence in their lives. Of course, if you father is teaching you the right way to live, then you have to explain why you didn't follow his advice — and commit yourself to staying out of places like this in the future!

No Father Figure

I really didn't have a father figure in my life. My dad ain't never called to wish me "Happy Birthday" or just to see how I was doing. I even call him on my birthday and he doesn't even remember what day it is, but I really don't care 'cause I had older brothers who looked out for me. They taught me how to be a man. My mom could not really do it, so they took over.

-Stagalee B4

From The Beat: Can you think of anything a private or government (school?) program could do to change this picture, to make young men understand their responsibility when they bring a child into the world? Why do we read so many pieces in The Beat about absent fathers? What did your brothers teach you about being a man? Did they say anything about what it means to become a father and act like one? How will you be different with your kids, if and when you have any?

Now We're Working Together

My father is in my life. He tries to get me to do the right thing, but we on two different paths. But we get along now, so that's cool.

-Mitchell B2

From The Beat: It's good you two are getting along. What would he like to see you doing? What do you want for yourself? Could you guys meet in the middle?

Who I Look Up To

A person that I look up to is my OG homie, and my mom's old boyfriend. He has been a big influence on my life, because my father has been in and out of my life, so he's trying to be that father figure I never had. He tells me right from wrong. He always gave me things that my father didn't, like he would always give me advice on stuff, told me how to pull myself up, gave me money, and gave he gave me a place to live when my father didn't. So that's who I think is a father figure in my life.

-Mike B2

From The Beat: That's cool you have this person to look up to. But are you sure you want to be listening to someone on the block? You've seen what being on the block has gotten you, and you may want to think about retirement.

Never There

My biological father was never all, so forget him. The man that is raising me is a real man and he is there every time that I need him or if I don't need him, feel me. That's a man for you that can come in a family and raise kids that don't even belong to him. If you don't have a father like that, just be a good father to your kids when you have some.

-Ap B4

From The Beat: Any male animal can perform the biological act of producing offspring, but it takes a mature man, a man with a sense of responsibility and what it means to be an adult, to step up and be a true father. You are lucky to have this man in your life. What is he telling you now about your current situation? What do you need to sacrifice in order to remain with this great man and benefit from his wisdom?

Through Sickness And Good

Somebody that I look up to is my step-dad, because he was there since I was hella young. He was there when I needed him most. He was with me through sick and good, and he's also been there more than my father. So my step-dad is a real father.

-Stepson B2

From The Beat: We're glad to hear your stepfather had been there for you. What would your father figure think about whatever you were doing to get in the Hall? How can you repay him for being such a stand-up person in your life?

What Father Figure

I never really had father. When I was little, he was always in and out of jail. And when he was out, he was beatin' on my momma. So my big cousin was my father figure.

He died two years ago so I been on my own from then.

Big Bor, see you when I get there. RIP.

-Lil' Tuna B4

This sad picture is all too common, absent fathers or fathers you wish were absent so they'd stop beatin' on your mama! When you become a father, how will your own father's behavior affect the kind of father you want to be?

He's Gone

I haven't seen my father since I was two. He serving time in state prison, 25 to life for killing some one. That's why I'm on the block selling drugs like a quart of pop.

-Spoon B4

From The Beat: Some people would say that if your pops is in prison, you would do whatever you have to do to avoid the same fate. If you keep up your "business," you just might be joining your father...

Let Me Hear You Now!

Life or death we smash
No holds barred get a grip
Get hit by this runaway train
If you slip
I'm up fo' Jesus, I'm not playin'
Yo, dawg, it's real, yo' platinum grill
Mean nothing when you not in his will
I'm not fake about nothing
Tell you to yo' face
When you die everything gone stay its place
I'm not commercial, I make music
How I feel it, how I'm led by the spirit
Dawg, I make you hear it
When I'm finished wit' my verse
It's like my foot on yo' neck
Leave you breathless when I leave
Show some respect
This fo' all the youth on the street
Dawg, you need the truth
Jesus came to set the world free
Not only me but to anyone who wont believe
This how we ride 'til the day we die
We throwin' this up keeping it crunk
When you ride this will bang in yo' truck

Hook:

If you posted on the block
Let me hear you now
If you sittin' in the club
Let me hear you now
Doin' time in the pen
Let me hear you now
Everybody worldwide let me hear you now
Verse:

They ain't bumpin' me
'Cause I'm from a gospel record company
I'm far from a star wit' a random call
But still some cats bumpin' me
They reppin they city, why?
'Cause they wanna be weak
Super bad makin' 'em mad
Locking' 'em in a teepee
Now close yo' eyes
I'm 'bout to hit you

Wit' some game that'll have you so surprised
Like them 900 numbers have you mesmerized
We be claiming' God when we socialize
Now we about to rise
Hit 'em with word of God then mash on 'em
All types of deep cuts and bruises
Like glass on 'em
I ride fo' the G
I'll die fo' the G

You don't wanna see bees
I'm like a hot box wit' rocks
Hold too long then I'm bound to drop
I'm non-stop, we gone have it locked
So sit down when we spit
'Cause you might get dropped

Verse:

Ain't nobody holding' me down
Every day I'm like what
Asking' Lord have mercy
Why you cannot have enough
A yo, we back up in it
Shoot, the three win it
Got them trapped in 2/3
How much time, like 3 minutes
In the 4th quarter
No overtime, let' put 'em out
Let's show 'em how we get down
And what been' a team is all about
A yo, you wanna get down wit' us
You got to go pound for pound wit' us
Me and my crew we dangerous
Yes we are victorious
When I blow up I'm hard to bust
Preach the word like what
We ridahs fo' Christ
A dawg, this mean fo' life
I'm not like about to talk
The facts on you, you take the walk
Life or death, heaven or hell
Facts on you, you save yourself

Hook:

So if you posted on the block
Let me hear you now
If you sittin in the club
Let me hear you now
Doin' time in the pen
Let me hear you now
Let me hear you now

-Byron B4

From The Beat: We confess we are confused by this flow: We can't tell if you are seriously claiming a life for Christ, or making fun of that life. For example, when you write, "Hit 'em with word of God then mash on 'em/All types of deep cuts and bruises," it doesn't sound like the kind of activity God would endorse... Like all good poetry, there is much here that we would need to ponder for a while to absorb — or sit with you and have you explain every line! Maybe you could write an essay explaining the poem...

We All We Got

Me and my ninjas is all we got. I feel besides my fam they all I got. Even though we all don't get along with each other, but in the end, it we haven't killed each other, we all we got.

I look at it like this because half of me and ninjas always end up shooting each other, and that's the same for the ninjas I grew up with.

But when we get in this system, we all we got.

-Lil' Dakota B4

From The Beat: You bring up a very interesting point, LD, which is that while you can be shooting at each other on the outs, when you face a common threat (in this case, the Hall), you pull together because all you have is each other. Do you think if you and your rivals were under attack from a force or power outside the 'hood (think of an alien invasion from Mars), you would all forget your differences and face the new enemy united?

Life On The Streets

Life on the streets is crazy. People get shot, robbed, kidnapped, and sometimes killed, and even more than that at any given time. I've lost lots of family members and friends due to the streets and livin' in the fast lane.

A wise man once said, "Fast cars, fast money don't last for to long 'cause when da Feds start sniffin', time to relocate and recoup, yadidamean? 'Cause man, ninjas talk and just say anything, and the next things you know, your whole block is getting raided. So take notes.

To the fallen soljas, I love y'all and rest in peace. "Boom."

-Young Cd B5

From The Beat: How can you live on the daily without falling victim to the madness? Can one individual like you find a way around it? How? Have you changed the ways you operate on the street and at home so you don't have to spend time in places like this?

Why?

Why do we do what we do? Because we young, black and just don't give a you-know-what. We coming up in a mess time, you feel me, and when we on the block you got to be hard because these ninja will get on you if you ain't.

So when we out there, we got to put that game face on and put that hand to work when it's needed. So I guess that's why we do what we do.

-Lil' Dakota

From The Beat: We think there is some truth in what you say, Lil' Dakota, but we have to ask why it is that some young black men in the 'hood don't do down the same path? It is undoubtedly difficult to resist the things that brought you here, but then, isn't this also difficult? In other words, when all your choices are difficult, why do some people go down one road and others go down a different road?

Can I Talk To Dr. Phil?

I need help wit' a lot of stuff. I always be messin' up good relationships with people, 'cause I don't trust a lot of people. I've been betrayed by people I love and I thought loved me. I messed up relationships wit' people that really care, but I thought I couldn't trust 'em so I cut it off. I need to be more trustful.

I need help wit' being able to stay at home, not staying out all night livin' wit' my friends and stuff.

-Tyree B2

From The Beat: What makes it so that you don't want to be in the house? You don't ever have to trust anyone again, but things go a lot easier if you can find people you trust. Where are you looking and finding these people you can't trust?

Helpful Thinking

I need help with knowing how to think my way out of a negative situation in a more positive way by thinking more hard and not just doing the first thing that comes to my mind.

-Young Los B2

From The Beat: Good way of thinking. How are you going to press that into your mind for future use? Why do you think it's so hard for some people to think clearly in tough situations?

Memories

Memories constant
like opening a wound
I'm taking me apart again
I heard much more, from anytime
before I had no options left again.
I don't want to be the one
the battles always choose
because inside I realize that
I'm the one confused
I don't know what's worth fighting for,
or why I just don't scream
I don't know why I instigate and say what I don't mean
I don't know how I got this way
I know it's not alright
so I'm breaking all habits tonight

Never moving forward
so there never be a past

I don't know what's worth fighting for
or why I just don't scream
but now I have some clarity to show you what I mean,
I'll never fight again because this is how it's ends.

-Maven B4

From The Beat: Well, Maven, we've definitely missed you. We can't say we fully understand this poem (like much of your writing...), but like all your work, certain lines jump out at us, and we love them. It's your sense of confusion that we understand and appreciate, but when you say it ends here, we're not sure what it is that will end here. Can you explain?

**I've lost lots of family members and friends due to the streets
and livin' in the fast lane.**

Good-bye, Beat

I just want to say that I really ain't got nothing to say about the topic tonight, but I'm just gon write about me hopefully getting out.

But anyways, when I get out I'm gon to spend a lot of time with my son and daughter, 'cause I'm tryin' to be a role model in their lives. I'm tryin' my best to do right by them.

I ain't gon lie, I've been in the system when both of my lil' two kids was born. That was the most important thing I missed. I'm just a young kid in the system tryin' to go home, and do what's right, and take care of my business. I missed out of a lot of things with them and I'm tryin' to gain that back.

I know what I got to do to take care of them which is get a job and finish school.

-Jay Baby B4

From The Beat: You've missed out on a lot, Jay, and we're sorry for that. But if missing out has taught you the importance of finishing school and getting a job in order to take care of your children, then maybe it's been worth it... We hope when you do walk out these doors you'll remember how much you missed being away from your lil' family — and how much they truly need you.

Keep It In Check

I need help with controlling my temper. To be real, ninjas be getting me hella heated. Sometimes it's over something hella little, but when I can't control my temper, I start poppin' major attitude and I be like wanting to get revenge. I like to talk so much shhh when I'm mad. The bad thing is I always think about fighting or just start some shhh with any ninja, or the ninja that's getting me mad.

People say I'm evil, but I really ain't, feel me. People gotta realize that they need to respect me in order for me to respect them. But feel me, there's certain people that know what I'm talking about. They know betta to start shhh with me because they know I won't stop till I win. So they already know, that's why some ninjas, don't say shhh at all, even though I'm there runnin' my mouth. Peep that.

-Young Tin YTEC

From The Beat: Maybe that's what you should be doing. Why do you need to react to those things in a violent way, little or not? Why even be around people that you know will get you hot enough to start fighting? In this day and age people are forgetting how to fight. They want an easy way out, so instead of expending the energy to fight with you some may take more drastic measures. We don't think you're evil, but some of what you describe fits the definition of "bully." Are you a bully? How are you working on controlling your temper?

It Was Right At The Time

I got me and my girlfriend arrested in a stolen car. How stupid was I! I should have never made a telephone call.

I should've got out of the car and ran as fast as I can. Instead, I prayed to God and put my hand up like a man LV got to do thirty days, and my cousin just got out of 850

Now he's acting straight

Well, me, I got a big fat break

They let me go home

Just want to say thank you to God

And let LV be strong

I knew it was wrong

But it was right at the time.

-Phu Guy YTEC

From The Beat: Why were you driving a stolen car in the first place? What was important enough to risk not only your own freedom but someone else's as well? What does the phone call have to do with anything? What have you learned from this experience — meaning, what will you NOT do when you taste freedom again?

**People say I'm evil,
but I really ain't,
feel me.**

My Prayer

Lord, watch over me

Lord, help me not to do what's against Your Word
Lord, please forgive me for the wrong I'll do and have done.
Lord, I'm striving to get out of this ditch that I've placed myself in.

I read and I believe in Your Word.

I need help in staying on the right path like all others.

I love you Lord.

-Pg B5

From The Beat: We think this is a fine prayer, PG, but there's one line in it that has us worried. You ask the Lord to forgive you for wrongs that you will do — in the future! Are you planning to do wrong in the future, or is this a prayer to help you not do wrong in the future? Anyway, asking for help is an acknowledgment that you need help, and that is the first step toward change.

I Don't Get It

I don't understand why ninjas rob ninjas
I don't understand why ninjas kill ninjas
I don't understand why ninjas sell crystal
I don't understand why ninjas say it's official
I don't understand why ninjas buy killas

-Y-Hitta B2

From The Beat: We don't understand it either. This list could probably go on and on. We don't understand how many people have to get hurt, killed, strung out, or sent to prison, before things start getting peaceful.

**I know what
I got to do to
take care of them
which is get a job
and finish school.**

How Do I Survive?

How do I survive?

Be strong, keep my head up, and watch my friends?

Can't do that 'cause ninjas killed my only friend,

RIP Lee.

Watch my back, pray for the best
and plan for the worst.

Man, I tried and am still trying
But my day could be any day so that won't work
'cause ain't no escape from death
Man, why do the good die young?

I wonder every day.

What is you gon do when you touch?

What's your plan? How do you plan to survive?

I'm still planning, but you know what they say

It never hurt to ask for help

-Young Cd B5

From The Beat: Far too many people are dying young, and that's just not the way things are supposed to be. The fact that you want help is encouraging because it's another way of saying that you can't do it alone. None of us can. But asking for help and getting it are two different things, so you're going to have to rely on yourself. Just asking yourself, "What's my plan?" is a good place to start, even if you don't know the answer just yet. The Bible says, "Seek and ye shall find." We don't know if that's true or not, but we know the opposite is true: if you don't seek, you'll never find. So, Young CD, go for it!

Sweet Lady

Sweet lady would you be mine

Sweet love for a lifetime

I'll be there if you need me

Just call and receive me.

Dedicated to my boo my rock

Girl love you

-Young Threadz B4

From The Beat: What a sweet love poem this is. Does this girl know how you feel about her? What makes her your special girl? Does she feel the same about you?

The "Y" Or The "Pen"

Next month, I gotta go see what's up with the 707 hearing that I'm fightin'. As for me, personally I think I'm going to lose it 'cause they say my background is messed up, and on top of that, my PO is a hater. She claims that she is mad at me for comin' back, but I don't care what she thinks 'cause she never liked me from the day she met me.

The DA claims they get strong evidence, so he's tryin' his hardest to make me look at a lot of time. I hope I beat this case so I can go to YA, but if I don't, Big House, here I come.

-Young Fatz B5

From The Beat: It's messed up when you're hoping to be sent to the Y! But whether it's the Y or the pen, has this "punishment" done anything to change how you look at the world, or what you hope to do in it? Because whether it's the pen or the Y, you will be getting out, and then you will again be making your own decisions (after a long time when others are making them for you). Have you thought about those decisions you'll have to make when you rejoin the so-called "free" world?

World, Forgive Me

Human population, please forgive me for I have did my part to your destruction, helping to further the cause of the human exiting as we see it.

Parents, please forgive me. I'm sorry for breaking your son's spirit, (ruining his image), but the way he was carrying on, I knew I had to step in and make a change to his pattern now, or he would be lost to these streets. What he turned to, I never knew that would happen. I'm truly sorry.

Lil' kids, I pray you make it because you have a hard road ahead.

-Pg B5

From The Beat: Along with your prayer, PG, this heartfelt apology is an important thing to write and to feel. Whatever you have done that you have remorse for now can be balanced in the future by doing good where before you did bad, feel us? We know you are sincere about the feelings you're expressing here, and we hope that you will continue to feel this way when you're on the outs again so that you can make up for the bad things you've done, and so that you can stay out of here!

Money

Long term, later in life, I want to get a good-paying job that would get me a car and get me a life so I can get out of here and go home.

-Jordan B2

From The Beat: We may be wrong, but don't you need to get out before you can get the job and the car? Seriously though, what kind of job would you want to get? How are you going to make sure you get there? What steps do you need to take?

It's Hard

I love my life, but too many men in my family have been murdered. I feel sorry for the people that are gonna have to go through pain. But I am going to try to stay alive in this life that I live.

It's already hard for a young black man in this life that I live.

-Lil' Dub B1

From The Beat: What is hard about your life? Is it school, the environment you reside in? What would make your life easier?

Love Is A Strong Word

My girl is so fine, I think of her all the time. When I sleep, I dream of her, and I know she think of me. Or is she with a new guy 'cause I'm in here in YGC.

She mad at me 'cause I don't listen to her. So she said, "Why you don't listen to me?" I said, "I don't know, 'cause you don't love me."

She said, "What? What you mean?"

I said, "You go home when I need you, you go with your girls, and I saw you with a guy."

She said, "No, that 's my cousin."

I don't care you say what you want. I like you but love is a strong word, so yeah.

-Rick B1

From The Beat: Sticky situation indeed. Relationships are tough things to deal with sometimes, when the communications are sour.

You are still young and learning about relationships, and from our experience, you will continue to learn about them for the rest of your life.

Me And My 'Hood

My 'hood, to me can't live without yo' heat.

Body left and right in the streets

'Cause people's kids gotta eat

Beef? What's that the opposite of chicken

People on a mission, not good but bad intentions,

People call me J-Doe

Most people know my whole MO

Some people say I'm crazy but my girl don't think so

She say I'm intellectual, smart, cute, funny

I say I'm a man 'cause the choice i make

I'm really not grown yet no matter what path I take

To summarize my story wit' no reasons to wonder why

Ming Lee, Joe Cheez, Hitman, Reem Dog.

Fred-Fred, Deshawn and Cynthia had to die

RIP

I will see y'all when I get there

I luv you big sis

-Young J-Doe B5

From The Beat: If bodies are falling left and right in the streets, who's feeding their kids? If it's right to shoot someone so your kids can eat, then is it also right to shoot someone's kid? We don't buy the line that people are shooting each other so they can feed their kids. We think they are kids themselves, and just like the big kids who live in the White House, they love playing with dangerous toys — pistols and rifles on the street, jet planes and rockets in the hands of the government. We wonder who is teaching who? Are the streets following the example of the government, or is it the other way around?

Chant

Smoke

Choke

Riverside dope

Greens

Funk

Pump in the trunk

Girls, boys

Beer and liquor

Cigarettes

Hotels

Weed and strippers

Fat girls

Little girls

Girls with whiskers

Fine girls

Pretty girls

Girls with cute sisters

Pimps, ballers, players, and OGs

Just another day in the streets.

-Lil' Lloyd B1

From The Beat: All this and more goes on in the streets every day. Why do you think all these things go on? Is there another side of this picture that would include the "squares" who go to school, who have parents (or a parent) they respect and honor, who conduct themselves as role models for their younger brothers and sisters? How would that chant go?

Need Help Fo' Real

Smoke by myself, drink by myself

Do every damn thang by my thugged out self, fo' real

I really need some help, fo' real

I done toked on hella blunts, fingertips so sticky and

stanking like skunk, fo' real

All by my thugged out self, fo' real...

Stay downin bottles of Henny, second choice is some

X-O, Remy M0et and Alizé is a lil' playas JRank

Crash out with a full bottle of some JDay

Hangovers evra day

As soon as I wake up in the morning, I fade

I take a shotgun, with some Remy and some pane

What, fo' real, I really need some help

-Jd B5

From The Beat: We're not quite sure what you say you need help with. You seem to glorify all these drugs (including alcohol) you take until the very end when you ask for help. So we wonder, do you really want to give these crutches up, or do you still think they can help you walk? If it's help you're truly looking for, where are you looking? Have you tied AA or NA? Do they help? Why do you think so much of your life is spent getting high?

Real Talk

As I sit back and write a lyrical rhyme

Life ain't fine

But it's a miracle I even made it, hated on gang related

acts

And that's a fact

Slaves to the system got me caught up in a storm

Why was I born

To be affiliated in this grimy ass shhh

And push rocks just to stack a little chips

Life ain't worth livin' in a cell

Sometimes I rather die but I realize

Life worth livin' when I got a beautiful queen by my side

Mad love, still tryin' to stay away from catching a slug

And that's real, I'm out

One luv to my beautiful queen

-Baby L YTEC

From The Beat: It's all good to give props to your girl, but what have your boys done for you since you've been dealing with this probation stuff? Are they supporting you, and making sure you are on the right track to getting off probation?

Familiar Story

When I get out I'm never coming back. My whole structure is going to change. I'm going to get back into sports and other things that is positive. Then I'm gonna go holla at a few girls, and put 'em on my team.

-Lazarus B1

From The Beat: How are you going to make sure that you don't get involved in all the negative things that could get you off track? Besides schooling and sports, what other things are you going to get into?

Help

I need help with my problems I have right now. I can't see my baby nephew. I can't be there for my sister's sweet 16. I miss my family too much.

-Denny B1

From The Beat: It isn't a good feeling at all to be separated from your family and miss those things that can never be repeated. We hope you remember how bad it felt when you are on the outs again, so you'll do what you need to do to stay out.

Riding In A Car

Riding in a car

I like to be the one to drive

Unlike my brother who always sits in the back seat

He enjoys just riding along

Free to take in scenes along the way

Girls and all that rather than having to watch where he's going

He doesn't like to ride with me though

He accuses me of doing seventy five to a hundred miles per hour right in the neighborhood

I admit I drive fast, but not that fast though

Although I like to get a whiff of burnt rubber every now and then

I'm a front seat rider all the way

If I ride at all it's got to be behind the wheel

-Lil Clap B1

From The Beat: Why do you like to drive so much? Why do you need to be in the drivers seat? Is your brother older or younger? Does he drive yet? (Do you have a license, 'cause driving without one is just not smart.)

**Life ain't
worth
livin' in
a cell**

Don't Kill

I think that people should not kill each other because some kill for not reasons, and some kill for good reasons. But I think killing is not a good thing because some people want to live to see their grandbabies and live to be very, very old.

-Mark B1

From The Beat: What are "good reasons" to kill? We wish the killing would stop, but the ones doing the killing always think they are doing it for "good reasons." We wish we knew what they were.

Still Smoking

I feel when I get out everything I did will turn around. Well, not everything, but certain things like selling drugs and robbing people.

The only thing I will still do, like smoke and stay outside. But I will listen to my grandmamma, mom and all my elders. I am going to mess with my female and smoke, then chill with my family.

-Eddy B1

From The Beat: If you didn't listen to your elders before, what's going to make you listen to them now? If you hang with your homies on the street, what's to keep you from coming back here?

Before I Act

we are children of god
 sons of god
 so we must act like
 when you feel like
 committin' a sin
 you should think
 about it before you do it
 because it will get you
 in the long run
 something like karma
 look where i'm at
 from not thinking
 before i act
 that's why
 i'm telling y'all
 before y'all mess up

-Lil' T

From The Beat: Unfortunately, most of our readership already have messed up, or they wouldn't be here. So, before you mess up again, think before you act; which really means, stop — stop and think. And if you can't think — just stop.

Ten Wishes

I wish I could turn my life around.
 I wish I could have a job that pays good money.
 I wish many people could live their lives without drugs.
 I wish the devil would stay out of our lives
 I wish I could become famous one day
 I wish that crime did not exist.
 I wish God would forgive me for my past.
 I wish life was about God and goodness.
 I wish my family would get along with me.
 Most of all, I wish that nobody makes the same stupid mistake I did.

-Bilal

From The Beat: What a great wish list. You can have it all, in time, if you do your part. Wishes 1, 3, 4, 6 & 8, can come true for you starting today, if you just change how you think and what you do (but you can't change what the next man will do). 7 is already true, and 10 proves it. Stay with all of these long enough, and 9 will come true, too. As for 5, a good reputation with those that know you, beats fame with those that don't.

Ten Wishes

I wish that I could be at home with my family.
 I wish I could stay out of trouble.
 I wish I could spend time with my little sister.
 I wish I could be a big brother to my little sister.
 I wish I could help my mom and dad out.
 I wish I could quit coming to the Hall.
 I wish that I could be better in sports.
 I wish I could be better at math.
 I wish I could be better at reading.
 I wish that I could see some purple trees.

-Marcus

From The Beat: Purple trees and being better at math, are wishes as opposite as can be. Keep smoking those trees, and math will be forever a mystery! We don't really see how it will help out with your other wishes much either. How about this? Put it the purple on hold till you've got the first nine to shine like gold. 'Cause those first six are all things that you can fix. And for seven and nine, practice will make you better in time.

I wish that nobody makes the same stupid mistake I did

My Ninjas

everything go down on my block
 selling weed — fights —
 everything you can think about
 i wish my ninjas was out to see
 what is happenin' at home
 let my ninjas and me be free
 let us go home

-Lil' Booda

From The Beat: Can you walk down the block and pass up those knocks? 'Cause if you go back to grinding on the block, you'll also go back to lock up.

My Last Piece

What's up, Beat? This is my last time writing for you, 'cause I'm getting out on Thursday.

I have to go back to a group home. I don't know why though! I did my three months. I wish I could go home!

Anyway, I just want to say what's up to all, I'm leaving here in the Hall. Stay up.

-Rich

From The Beat: Counting days will drive you crazy! Forget about months and just do your program one day at a time. Then, the day will come, when you can go home to stay. Okay?

Reminiscence

I'm back in the Hall, because I messed up once again. This time I'm in here for good.

I went to court on Wednesday, the sixteenth, and the judge told me that I have a CYA commitment of eighteen months. They're about to send me to max' pretty soon.

But when I was out, every time I would be told to stop doing the things I do, I used to tell myself to "laugh now, cry later." So, now I guess that "later" has come!

I was always told that I was gonna end up in a real jail, and that's what I got comin' now. I never listened when I was told I should leave my homies. I would always ride with them to the fullest.

Stay up. And when I get out, I'm still going to be down for my block and my varrio. I'll be out soon enough.

To my family that I love, I want everyone to keep their head up. And when I finish doing my little time and get out, I'm gonna get out and smash. But it ain't nothing, 'cause nothing has changed. We ain't scared to do what we got to do.

But I gotta get myself together and get on with my life. I got to make a decision that has to determine the future of my life. At this point in my life, it's really difficult, but if I got to choose between the homies and my home — I'm gonna choose my family. But I'm still gonna have my homies' back to the fullest.

-Scarface

From The Beat: We're not convinced you're any more ready to listen now than you were before, and that is no laughing matter. In fact, it's a crying shame. There can be no 'ifs, and's, or but's' — 'cause if you continue to ride and smash on rivals, you've already chosen to spend much of the rest of your life in prison. To really have your homies' backs, show them another way to act — a way that won't end in prison or an early grave. Do it for your family and for your homies! But you're not listening, or are you?

Boy

i come from
 them streets
 and you know what
 that means
 i got the power
 to make a girl scream
 'cause she like
 what she see in me
 bein' me

-Lil' Kev

From The Beat: Ascribe it to you, not the street, or you'll be screaming defeat, when you come back to lockdown next week.

My Father

My father is in my life, along with my mom. My father gives me what I'm supposed to get. That is my father figure, my father!

-Marcus

From The Beat: What are you "supposed to get" from a father?

Bible Study

"We are children of God! Sons of God! We're heirs of God, joint heirs with Christ! We joyfully confess our relationship with God. And in what way are we related to Him? We're born of God. Children of God. He is our very own Father. We are his very own children. We dare to take our place as sons and daughters of God and confess that's what we are."

-Lil' Momo

From The Beat: What do these words mean to you? If you see yourself as a son of God, does that help you change what you do? The night you wrote this, we came in right after "God Squad" left. Do you think there should be speakers and teachers from other spiritual traditions coming into the Hall to help you, too?

To Be a Counselor

When I grow up, I would like to be a counselor in the Hall, because I could teach them youngtas a huge lesson.

If they do anything, I would slam them on their noggin; and repeat on their noggin. But if they don't work, I would keep them in their room for a week; then spray mace in their eyes for being dumb.

The Beat probably thinks that's cruel punishment, but I don't. You know why? Because you got to teach these young ones a lesson to make them not want to come back to jail, before they go to the pen — 'cause that's where they'll get cruel punishment.

-Poppaditty pop

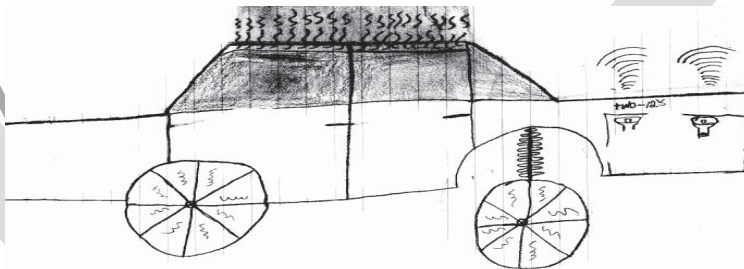
From The Beat: There's nothing more important than teaching, but what would you be teaching? That it's better to be the one doing the beating than it is to get beaten?

I Need Help

I need help with my life, because I have been a total mess up, my whole life! I need help with my education and my social skills, so I can learn how to deal with bullies.

-Jeffrey

From The Beat: Make an effort and we're sure, you'll get the help that you deserve. Thanks for your straightforward words.



Help

i need help
with my life
i need help
with my reading
i need help
with staying out
of juvenile hall
i need help
with my football skills
i need help
with my math
i need help
with learning my history
i need help
with my basketball skills
i need help
from god
i need help
from my mother
i need help
because i can't
do it on my own
i need help

-Jw

From The Beat: Admitting you need help, is the first step toward getting it. But even if you can't do it alone, neither can anyone else do it for you. You need to be responsible for your part. And we know you've got the heart!

Dedicated To Lil' Molly

Peep this lil' one,
I was wit' you when you was straight up broke,
I was wit' you befo' you had a bundle of coke,
But now that you got bread the females is all on you,
When they see you on those,
They all on the' toes,
Tryna see how much they could get of yo' doe,
But not me 'cause I'm still wit' you,
I'm gon' have yo' back boo,
Shhh I'm ready to help you get yo' money get yo' bread,
Make sure that you don't come up dead,
And you say you want to cut yo dreads,
I ain't mad you still gone be my one and only man.
Yahnasayin'

-Young T-Hawk

From The Beat: We love to read your work Young T-Hawk. This piece is solid in structure, rhyme, and content. Two main themes are jumping out: money and loyalty. How do you think those two ideas are related and do they go together? Is one more important than the other? Are they separate? What would it be like in your ideal world?

My Pops

Let me start by saying what's up to all. Well, I was lucky enough to know my pops.

He was not the greatest, but he's my pops. He drank and did drugs a lot, plus some jail time. He was not at home when I was awake. He only came home at night.

I did not really get to know him until I was about eleven, when I started to come to jail. Now we're pretty tight.

He had another son, and with him he's trying to do what he didn't do with me and my sis'. He got right! And now we see each other more than when I was younger.

Well, I got to get going. Stay up.

-Crazy

From The Beat: Let his example of getting right, inspire you to win your fight to stay free. He wasn't there when you were younger, but he's proving it's possible to change. Good luck at ROR Maintain. As your father's example shows, you have a lot to be gained. You know?

Robert My Father Figure

My father figure is Robert, he is very important to me. He is the main person that raised me and my sister since we were babies, and I think we are very fortunate to have him in our lives.

I look up to my dad for many reasons. Some of them are that he has never left us or gave up on me. Also, he always wants the best for me and my sister even when we don't have enough; he always puts us first and respect that.

Most of all I love him and the saddest thing about being locked up is I can't see him everyday. I'm just happy he visits every weekend and I saw him on father's day.

-Gina

From The Beat: Gina, we love to hear how much you appreciate your father's consistency and how he stands by you no matter what. What is the most important lesson you have learned from him, and what is a lesson that you've learned being locked up that you could teach him?

AWOL From Camp

Ay, this is that Hayward soldier, Lil' Rickie. Yeah, I'm back in the Halls because I made a stupid decision and didn't go back to Camp. Now I got only two choices that I don't get to decide, which is CYA or back to Camp. I go to court in a couple of days.

-Lil' Rickie

From The Beat: Whatever happens, we hope you learn something from it. Think about what you really wanna do in life. Take care of yourself and make decisions that work in your favor. Remember, soldiers are set up to die; warriors fight to live.

My Father

My father plays the fatherly role, he is my biological father. Even though he's been out of my life for seven years.

It's not his fault; it's my mother's fault 'cause she kept me and my sister away from him! When he was in and out of jail my mom would move from house to house. Every time he would try to come visit us we would be at a different house. He would send us letters, my mom would never, well hardly ever, give us any of the letters he would send us from Rita!

But now my dad is always there for me and my sis, more than my mother is actually. He straightened up his life, he's not selling any drugs anymore, and he's not a full time gangbanger! He still rep's his hood.

-Michelle

From The Beat: Michelle, your father sounds like a caring person and we're glad that y'all are together. Hopefully you don't have too much anger towards your mom. Is it possible she was doing what she thought was best for you and your sis? We hope that your life with your dad continues to flourish.

My Love For You

roses are red
violets are blue
i could never love someone
like how i love you
you were there for me
through the thick and thin
never left the side of my bed
not even when i was sick
and now i'm here all alone
thinking all day
with nothin' else to do
i just pray and pray
waiting for that day
that god allows me to come home
so i keep my head up
and now it's time to stay strong

-Rich

From The Beat: She stayed by you, now how can you stay by her? Stay strong and before long, you'll be going home. But then, if you just go back to the same old junk (pun intended), you'll go right back to lockdown, feeling like a punk. Stay up but not high!

my dad
is always
there for
me and
my sis



A Homie

A real homie nowadays, they're hard to find, but I got one, and that's my boy, Charlie, and a couple of other ones, they know who they are! They never go faulty on a soldier from those Hayward streets. Otherwise, I send my love and utmost respect to y'all.

-Lil' Rickie

From The Beat: You're right — a real homie is hard to find. If you have more than a couple, you are a really lucky person. So keep tight with your real homies and maybe you and your real homies can help each other stay out the Halls. A real homie will support you no matter what.

Feelings

i feel like running away
 i wish that i was with my family
 i miss my father
 the person i love is my mother
 the person i don't like is the devil

-Ken

From The Beat: Work on you, and things will get better, too.

I Send My Love To . . . !

My grandparents, my folks, my brother, my adopted mother, Jami, also a good friend — my dream girl, Melissa. I love all of you! Take care.

-Lil' Rickie

From The Beat: Try to stay out the these Halls so you won't have to be sending your love — you can be out there sharing your love. Think about what's most important in your life!

Not Winning

you told me that you will be
 my king and i will be your queen
 and that you will fulfill all my fantasies
 and you made it sound so real
 that i gave you my heart and you broke it
 and like a glass it shattered everywhere
 all of a sudden you made me feel

like i wasn't even in your heart from the beginning
 we're playin' this game and i hate not winning

-Lil' Mama Hanna

From The Beat: No dis', but believe this: 'I will fulfill all your fantasies' does not foretell love's realities but a player mentality. Don't set yourself up for these calamities.

A Freestyle

all my life it seems
 every door i open
 has curses
 snatchin' female purses
 from slangin' drugs
 to spittin' verses
 i can't find a way out
 so lock the door
 and shut him out
 what i'm about
 rocks in my mouth
 till my whole garden sprouts
 but what y'all don't know
 my world is cold
 i come from a hole
 so if i pack up and go
 i bet it will knock me off my toes

-Scooby

From The Beat: You're still young, only sixteen. We hope you survive the scene you can't seem to escape, 'cause there will come a time when you realize there's no other way but to pack up and go. But nothing will change till you put your heart, mind and soul toward creating a new role for you to play before you throw your life away. There are plenty reasons it's hard to change, but not a single one worth the pain!

what y'all don't know my world is cold

Fall Back

fall back —
 take a look at me
 an' you'll see
 i'm for real
 i feel what only i can feel
 an' if that don't appeal
 to you let me know
 an' i'll go
 'cause i flow
 better when
 my colors show
 an' that's the way
 it has to be
 honestly
 'cause creativity
 could never bloom
 in my room
 i'd throw it all way
 before i'd lie
 so don't call me
 with a compromise
 hang up the phone
 i've got a backbone
 stronger than yours
 i know you think
 you know me like yourself
 but i fear
 that you're only telling me
 what i wanna hear
 'cause you don't give a damn
 understand that i can't
 not be what i am
 i'm not the milk an' cherries
 in your spoon
 it's not a simple here-we-go
 not so soon
 might've fallen for that
 when i was thirteen
 an' a little more green
 but it's amazing what
 a couple of years mean

-Satan

From The Beat: It's hard to comment on the content of your poem, however well-written, when you don't know to whom you write. Is this someone pulling on your heart strings, a potential lover, or a friend? But when we see the name with which you sign your piece, we can't help but conjecture that it might be to the devil. If so, just say no, and continue to grow independent. 'Cause you deserve more than hellish treachery. You deserve to be free and stay free of all such demonolatriy.

Harold B, RIP

My Name Is Trenell. This is a little something I am writing about my family. See, my family, we're soldiers, and we're always going to be soldiers.

My little cousin, Harold B, may he rest in peace; and my cousin Eric Carral B aka EJ, may he rest in peace; and my step-dad Odie O, may he rest in peace — they were all soldiers. And it continues in my family to this day.

I'm going to tell you a story about my cousin, Harold. He just died, half an hour before his birthday. He was seventeen, getting ready to turn eighteen. He was a person who made his money legitimately — he had a job with UPS.

Top this though! Ninjas were watching him and also were jealous of him. He was a student at Skyline High School, a senior. He played football, and he had a nice little female friend.

One day some fools from another spot had stolen a car and stripped it. Now my cousin had just bought a brand new Buick Regal with the money he'd saved from his job, and these ninjas saw him in it — and they tried to strip him!

But he wasn't going out like that, because, like I said, we're soldiers. So they decided to leave him alone, and they went on about their business.

See, now, everyone in my family has got a temper. So my cousin got mad and went to get his AK to shoot the fool who had tried to strip him. And he shot him, in his back. But, yes, he's still alive.

Now all this street trauma had started over some rims! They thought that my cousin was going to buy some rims off the car this fool had stripped. And remember, too, what I said about ninjas being jealous nowadays — so they didn't want my cousin to stunt.

So after Harold had shot this fool, this fool spread the word to his potnas to look for Harold. And one of his potnas came to see Harold walking into a store. So they followed him, and they shot Harold on the right side of his head and shot my other cousin, Tiger, Harold's younger uncle, who was there with him, in the leg.

This was all because these ninjas had to be hard, but also because no one can go and shoot somebody and then think he can't or won't be touched, not Harold, and not the ones that shot him either.

My cousin was a stunna! And we're all soldiers. Rest in peace, Harold B; forever shining. You will be remembered, Harold B.

I wanna say, rest in peace to all my family: Odie O, my step-day; Latavia, my auntie; GG Pa, my great grandpa; Lil' Chris; Lil' Kev; CJ; my cousin, Raymond; my grandpa, Lil' Charlie; and most of all, Harold B. Rest in peace.

-T Girl

From The Beat: Your steady insistence that you and your family have tempers and that you and your family are soldiers — lines up right beside the list of family members you have lost. And it is heartbreaking! This tradition of hot-tempered gunplay has got to end, for the sake of your entire family, but especially the children! You can't change anyone else, but you can work on changing yourself. And as others witness the change in you, maybe they'll consider changing, too. For sure the children need to see someone in your family tree willing to exercise some patience, judgment and humility. Harold was a high school senior with a job — it's a tragedy! Bury your family's guns! So you don't have to bury your family's loved ones!

that i gave you my heart and you broke it and like a glass it shattered

Mi Vida Loca

The night is long
And the time goes slow
A shadow's creeping into the 'hood
I think it's time to smoke
The homies by the side
All I see is gray
I think
Is it the sky or the clouds... or the 'hood?

-Lil' Speedy

From The Beat: Interesting poem. Do you always smoke in the morning? Do you think you will ever stop smoking? Do you think you will always live the crazy life?

Un Pelon With Big Arms

I need to find a man
I want un pelon with big arms
And a nice stomach
And lots of tattoos
He needs to have his stuff together
And a place to stay
I need a man who respects me
And won't cheat on me

-Guera

From The Beat: There are lots of wonderful guys out there. Don't you think you need to stay out of Juvy long enough to meet some of them? Can you take it easy on guys? Remember, they're young, like you are. You can't expect any young man to answer all your needs or dreams. Can you just enjoy men for who they are? Not try to run them? Why not relax and let them come to you?

Right From Wrong

It's wrong for wannabee gangstas to sell drugs, rob, steal and murder. Why? They faking the funk. It's kinda like they out there for their own health, instead out there for their wealth. It's right when you really a hustla and tryna make a living for your family.

Rape, now that's a different story. It's wrong for anybody to rape.

-Young Sochie

From The Beat: Even if somebody has a record, do you think there are no legal jobs teens can get if they have to feed their families? Who feeds them when the dad or mom is locked up for selling drugs for months or more? Do you think murder is ever justified? Do you think calling yourself a hustla is real or is it weak? Why should hustlas get to poison, hurt, steal from or murder people just to get their bling bling on?

The System Is Wrong

Hey, what's up, Raza? Soy Flaco. I think that the system is wrong. I'm a person who has been locked up for eighteen months in different states. I got locked up in the East Coast and ended up here in California.

People think that by keeping us behind these walls we are going to change. Think again. With all this, all they are doing is preparing us for the big house. The only way you change is if you put your mind to it.

Me, I'm rehabilitated and ready to face the free world

-W

From The Beat: Do you take any responsibility in getting locked up on both coasts? Do you know what the laws are in the states you're in? Do you knowingly break those laws? If so, why? Are you willing to pay the price of breaking those laws? How are you rehabilitated?

It's wrong for anybody to rape.

Skept

Look at all those clothes, I scope
I think I'll steal and sell them for dope
I grab the most expensive clothes
skirts, shirts and panties galore

This is all at the

"Too expensive for what it is" Nordstrom's store

I walk slyly into the dressing room door

Straight stuff them in my bag

The girls on the block wish they had

Then skip out the door

After they're sold, I go back for more

All I got to do is sit on my steps

In twenty minutes the clothes disappear like a skept

Money, money, money — \$200 richer than before

This is just too easy to steal from this store

I hop in my dealer's car

We don't have to go very far

Quarter ounce, ahhh straight relief to my dome

It sucks, because I find myself sittin' alone in my home

-Kd

From The Beat: From your poem, it doesn't sound like ripping off Nordstrom's, then selling the clothes to buy drugs makes you very happy. Was it thrilling to get away with it a first, but now your whole enterprise seems empty? If clothes, money and drugs don't really make life worth it, what could you accomplish that would make you proud of yourself? Would you like to be a clothes designer, architect, businessperson, poet, lawyer? You're obviously smart and clever. How can you put your skills to their best use?

Why Me?

I always ask myself, "Why me?" because I feel sad for myself sometimes. I can't wait to get out of here. I have been in for two months. This has been the hardest time I have done in here. I have missed a lot of birthdays, including mines.

I have lost the girl who I cry for and worry about every night. I get out in sixty-five days from now. My life starts over when I get out. I am seventeen years old. I have been thinking a lot about my future. If I am going to make something out of myself or just end up in the pen.

-Kreppy Krawlar

From The Beat: Does the idea of going to the pen fill you with such terror that you've resolved that you don't care what you have to do or stop doing, you aren't going there? If not, why not? What do you want to make out of yourself? What are you good at doing? What do you enjoy doing? Are you still in school on the outs? Have you ever had a legitimate job? Can you get one, when you get out? How are you going to make sure you never get busted again, nor go to the pen?

Inside For A Long Time

Hey Beat,

It's Slop E from Marin. Well, I'm going to be here for a long time, because of my parents. My PO is trying to send me to placement, because I've been in and out for eight months. My life is really not good, because I am going through a hard time with my son's mom and I might not see him for a couple years.

-Slop E

From The Beat: Do you have any kind of stable life for yourself when you get out? Are you going to school? Do you have even a part-time job? What can you do, when you get out, to get your own life going the way you want it, so you can offer your parents and child a stable life, so they can rely on you when they need to? Is the problem essentially between you and you? What do you want for your life? Once you've established that, and maybe get some legal money coming in, you can help out with child support and maybe get to hang out with your son!

A Firme Hynita!

A firme hynita will be there for her vato; a firme hynita will be down for her vato no matter what. A firme hynita will forgive her vato's mistakes; a firme hynita knows how to treat her vato right and will love him no matter what.

I'm in here 'cause of my vato and I've learned my lesson for next time (Being a firme hynita is hard and at the end, I end up being the one getting hurt.) But you can't be a firme hynita if you don't have a firme vato.

-La Muneca

From The Beat: Who have you been listening to? It's not that this guy is wrong, but what about the test for a firme vato? Does he pass his own loyalty test? Do you think you have the right to demand the best from him, as he seems to be demanding of you? Yes, you do!

No Father Figure

I don't really have a father figure in my life, because he died when I was eight years old. I was raised by my mom and left without a father. I think his death is the reason for my association with gangs and drugs. I also feel that his death helped me mature faster on my own, without full positive enforcement.

I rely on my friends to support me and protect me and it gets better day by day and gives me a sense of family and support. I'm just glad that my friendships are so strong and my mom is always there for me.

-Marty

From The Beat: You have a beautiful attitude. It isn't your father's fault he died, nor your mother's. You sound like you think your mom is doing the best she can for you. Are your friends members of your gang? Sometimes gang homies can be truly loyal, or they can try to force you to put in work for your 'hood, etc., that involves illegal stuff. They can be there for you when you're in trouble, or they can cut you loose, like anyone can. You write like you're becoming self-reliant. That's all good!

I rely on my friends to support me

I'll Remember

Don't forget about me
Don't forget the love we have for each other
Don't forget the way I have your back to the fullest

Don't forget about the best
Don't forget about all the good times

Or the bad ones

We've been through a lot
And never once fought

Remember

Don't forget about how much

We've helped each other

And how far we've come

Don't forget about anything

Especially about how good you are

Don't forget about things

We want to prove to people

Always remember

I'll never forget you

-Gata

From The Beat: What about the things you want to prove to yourself? What are they? What do you wonder about yourself being capable of? How are you challenging yourself? How well do you manage on your own? What are your dreams? Why are you inside, if he's out? You're a wonderful poet and a lovely lady. You deserve the best.

How It Was

Looking at my life
Just wondering how I survived
Because it was hard at times
My mind was going crazy
I felt like taking my life
Or just running away
But I was too scared that
I would hurt my mom too much
Or end up in Durango
So all I did was put up with the nonsense
But now it hurts too much inside
So I cry every night asking God why
And if he can fix my life
But why, 'cause I know I'm going to die
Sometime in this life

-Ernesto

From The Beat: First, you're a good writer, Ernesto. Second, you're right, we're all going to die, eventually, but since you're here now, have you found anything that you happy, makes you feel your life is worth living? When did you start feeling like life was more of a burden than a joy? You write about being afraid in this poem, and sometimes, fear is a good thing, especially when it keeps us from doing things that would destroy us otherwise. From what you write, it seems you often ignore or possibly numb out your fear. Do you believe you know the difference between the fears that hold you back from opportunities and the fears that hold you back from harm? Can you listen to your fears that would hold you back from harm more often? This is one step you can take towards giving yourself a life worth living.



Play in the yard Instead of being watched by a guard

If You Don't Like The Time

This is a messed up life.
Doing the drugs ain't the life.
It just hurts you deep down inside.
Making you cry.
But, I wonder
Why do we choose that life?
Is it because we are hurting inside?
Or is it because we like the high?
You say that you don't like to hurt your mom.
But you didn't realize
Doing the drugs and the crimes
Are hurting deep down inside
Making her cry at night.
Making her wonder
If you're even going to come home at night
Or even if you're alive.
So, do good
Get in school
Make your life
Worth the best of time.
Don't do the stupid crimes
If you don't like the time
Because
I know it will just waste your life.

-Ernesto

From The Beat: Excellent piece. Is this poem addressed to you? You asked some pressing questions asked over and over by many people. "Why do we do what we do when it is messing up our life?" Are there answers within your questions? It sounds to us like you know what to do. Now all that is needed is for you to take those steps.

American Pledge For Our Soldiers

I pledge allegiance to American soldiers,
because they are dying for our country,
in which he or she still stands they will fight,
we trust them so and wish they will not go,
and we will remember our flag because it still waves in the air
and that America does care
Soldiers do cry as they are afraid they will die,
they are over there helping one another like big to little brother
War is not a game because death does cause realistic pain,
as I have grown, I wonder why daddy hasn't come home
I hear my mother cry in her room,
because I hear my brave daddy died fighting under a full moon
We are not only Americans, we are partners,
And as partners we work together.
Forever and ever

-Logan

From The Beat: Logan this piece is very timely. We like how you turned the pledge of allegiance into a tribute to our troops. As this war is not taking place on our homeland, we sometimes forget the danger and loneliness these men and women face daily over in Iraq. Your piece, Logan, is a poignant reminder of the emotional toll this war takes on those in battle. Thank you.

Your Parent's Love

Your parents love you
Sometimes they don't know what to do
You may not like the choices they make
But parenting is not as easy as cutting your birthday cake
They remember once you were on a tricycle
Now you're on a big kid bicycle
Parents are the ones we trust the most
They're the ones that won't say you're crazy if you said I saw a ghost
They will help you with a lot
All you have to do is give it all you got
Life is full of hard choices
But there will be many helping voices
One day in life you will say mom and dad, I love you so
But I'm now 18 and it's time to go
You are only a child once at all
Please don't take a bad step and fall
Play in the yard
Instead of being watched by a guard

-Logan

From The Beat: Are you challenging yourself in this piece? What can you do once you are released to live as "a child"? What do you need to learn to be prepared to say "good-bye" to your parents and move out on your own? You share memories of family interactions in each piece you write. Have you ever considered writing a story(ies) of your life?

Teens are too young to know true love

Serious

Teens are too young to know true love
Love is as beautiful as dove
Sex is a serious thing to do
Later he or she may not be with you
To be a parent takes a lot love
Not a family to push and shove
You need to make sure the time is right
So life is not difficult to fight
Do not chase your dreams
Live them but not in your teens
Be honest and true
And god will take care of you

-Logan

From The Beat: Very insightful, Logan. Sex and relationships involve responsibility and often teens become involved without seriously considering the consequences. Do you write about this from experience? How can you live this out in your own life? What do you want to achieve or experience in your life before you become a parent? What can you do to prepare yourself to be a loving parent?

Going Downhill

You may think you are tough,
But you know life is very hard and very rough
You try to say that you are better,
But you may actually be a bed wetter,
You may think you're the coolest in town,
But someday you may lose and go down,
You think you have grown up,
But in life you have just shown up,
What do you say the next time you take that pill,
Oh crap, I'm going downhill

-Logan

From The Beat: Sometimes people are not who they appear to be. Sometimes people put up fronts in order to hide their pain or weaknesses. Do you ever feel you have to pretend you are someone you are not? Are there things about yourself that you do not like? Can you accept your weaknesses, flaws and focus on your strengths? What are your strengths? How can you encourage others to be more real about who they are?

Who?

Who was there for me
When I was down?
Who cared for me
When I was sick?
Who kept me safe when danger was all around?
Who helped me
When no one else would?
Who forgave me for things no one else would?
Who comforted me
When I was all alone?
I guess, we'll never know who is who
But for now I will give thanks for my God in heaven
Helping me stay in place.

-Serina

From The Beat: Sometimes we can feel as if no one cares for us, and sometimes those we care about most are not there for us when we need them. In the midst of your loneliness, it sounds as if you are stretching yourself to find the positive. That alone takes strength and maturity. We encourage you to continue to reach out to others for help. Do not close off your heart. Be wise about whom you go to for help and with whom you spend your time.

Where can I go when I am sad?

I go to my mom and dad
They help me through the day
And I always want to stay
I will never leave, I will play
Anger is not to take out on others
Especially family like your brothers and sisters
People should share
Because they don't fight, they share
Do you like to feel pain?
Because inflicting it is a shame
Love is very powerful in a family's heart
Don't destroy it because it is the most beautiful art
I was not off on a great start
But I still have a lovely heart
I am still very young at 15
That would only make me a teen
Life is too short to waste
Lots of great food to taste
But when you are in jail
Your food is gross and stale
Why do people get hurt?
Maybe others treat them like dirt
Work together
Always and forever

-Logan

From The Beat: We feel what you're saying here, and we're sure other Beat readers will as well. What will it take for you to leave your bad start behind and experience all of the good things you mention here?

I Had A Choice

I had a choice between right and wrong,
I wonder why I am not strong,
I took a great fall,
And I don't know where I am at all,
It is hard to say no,
And corrupt the flow,
Because you may never want to do life,
I am going away,
See you another day.

-Logan

From The Beat: Does saying "No" really corrupt the flow? Is that because saying "No" force us to face uncomfortable feelings? Can we ride the storm of these feelings and develop the muscle of self-control and independence? This is an issue we all face. Self-control develops over time; it begins by monitoring what we think about over and over and then the choices we make minute by minute. Try to build up your ability to do what you know is safe and right rather than succumbing to peer pressure.

Lost Soul In The Hands Of Time

I'm a lost soul in the hands of time
All that runs through my young criminal mind
My lyrical poetry one-of-a-kind
But just a wasteless talent
While I'm sitting in detention
All alone in my cell it's depressing
Seventh time in here, still ain't learned my lesson
Everybody's always stressing
"When you gonna straighten up and pay attention?"
Plus I got a lot of aggression
Towards the system steadily wishing
They just listen to my pleas and cries
They're committing terrible tragedies
Breaking up happy families
But they're too blind to see
Setting us up for failure
While we're on probation
All sorts of stipulations
Waiting for one mess up, slap us with a violation
Once again we're facin' incarceration
That stuff ain't right
I'm blind walking down a path of wickedness
Cursed forever smoking cannabis
But nobody gives a shhh
Just a lost soul walkin' in the hands of time

-Raymond

From The Beat: You describe yourself as a lost soul . . . are you really lost or do you feel lost because the road of life you are on is not taking you where you want to be? You seem to blame others for your situation. Do you really think others want to see you fail, or is this just an excuse? Instead of blaming others, can you take a good, hard look at yourself at see how you're contributing to the situation you describe here? Use the power of your mind, the force of your anger and the support of positive people to propel you in a different direction.

'Bout to give up 'cause the future looks so bleak Tired of trying 'cause my body so

My Future Looks Bleak

Walking these halls frownin'
'Cause my PO, recommending Adobe Mountain
Feel like I'm drownin'
And everybody's standing around clownin'
While I'm struggling to get free
But they just tie weights around my feet
'Bout to give up 'cause the future looks so bleak
Tired of trying 'cause my body so weak
Looks like it's about time for me and my creator to meet
Fighting, but I slip deeper and deeper
Looks like they finally got their job done
As water starts to fill my lungs
Man, I rather get hung
So it would be quick
And no pain
This concrete cage driving me insane
Hearing voices screaming my name
So think twice before you become a victim in this cruel game!

-Raymond

From The Beat: Hopelessness can be crippling and drains us of our desire to go on. Have you lost all hope of a more positive future? Sometimes in the midst of our pain we can't see a way out. Find what is positive to occupy your mind. Hang on to a positive word from staff, a teacher, your mom — anyone who cares about you and wants you to have a future. It is always darkest before the dawn. Don't rob yourself of the opportunity to see the sunrise.



Who Do You Trust?

Who do you trust?
I hope not your friend in that drug bust
Have you ever told a secret saying this is only between us two?
And the next day everybody knew
That friend is not to be trusted
Because that can get you busted
You may have liked someone
And you told now you're the dumb one
Me, personally, I trust only my family
They won't tell a soul
Now my head is not so full
Don't give away your surprise
So you don't have to face laughs as
You cry

-Logan

From The Beat: Trust is essential in relationships. Without it our relationships are rocky at best. A family's trust brings security. Do you have any friends you can trust?

I'm finally going to tell the drug addict bye

Trying To Live A Good Life

Money,
Cars,
Girls,
Fame,
Yeah, that's what I need
Then I can finally set myself free
Out of this misery
Then I will fly very high like a bird in the sky
'Cause I ain't trying to die
I finally want to stay alive
I don't want people to ask me why
Because they will just lie
To other people
All the time
So I'm finally going to tell the drug addict bye
And I will never see them again
in my life

-Ernesto

From The Beat: Sounds like an exciting life . . . money, girls, fame, but do you think everyone who has these things is happy? We acknowledge your desire to be free from addictions, poverty, and loneliness. We all see the glitz and glamour of Hollywood, sports icons, and MTV, but is it for real? Do you think you could find happiness and peace in taking responsibility for your life, respecting yourself and others, and stepping out of your comfort zone to develop your skills, talents, and relationships? Whatever you do, escaping addiction is the way to start.

Surviving

I'm only a youngster going through this struggle. I'm struggling in the streets of south Richmond where ninjas get their life took and get their doors kicked in. The youngest ninja on the block trying to sell these damn rocks. I never knew my moms and pop. Doing what I got to do to survive.

-Reshon

From The Beat: The struggles you and other youngsters go through on the daily make it impossible for us to judge you, since we do not have to endure what you describe. At the same time, we can see where your efforts to survive have led you, so we have to ask: Isn't there another way? Haven't other young people in your situation found their own means of survival without risking their physical well-being, their lives or their freedom?

Help!

I need help with taking responsibility, and respecting my mom. I need help on my anger.

-Vincent

From The Beat: Are you getting help with your anger other problems at Walden House? What has been the most useful thing you have learned to deal with these problems?

Like A Soldier

What's up bro? Missed me by a week, Homes. I'm out now. I heard you was locked up now for the summer. Don't know what happened, but I'm sure you went out like a soldier. Try to turn this around while you still can. Mad respect.

-Jack O

From The Beat: We're sorry your homie got locked up, and we appreciate your advice to him to turn it around while he still can. But we're also interested in what it means to go "out like a soldier." We read in this morning's newspaper that many, many soldiers returning from battle in Iraq (and every other war) bring back mental scars, and suffer from Post Traumatic Stress. From our observations, many of you also suffer from this condition. Do you think there are similarities between the "soldiers" you know from the streets, and the soldiers who now have such difficulties adjusting to society?

A New Life

I need help with being faithful to my baby's mom so she could love me even more. I need help with saying no to drugs so I could stay out of jail. I need help with being a great father to my daughter. I need help with being a good role model for my sister and my two brothers. I need help with standing up for myself and letting people know how I feel. I need help with my attitude because it reflects on who I am.

I need a new life because this life ain't shhh!

RIP Cheez, Reem, Chuck, Fred, Lee, Ken Tay, D-Dirt.

-Duke-EI

From The Beat: We admire you for knowing so clearly what you need help with and asking for it. We hope you're getting some or all that help now. At the same time, we also hope you see the connection between the things you need to change and the tragic list that follows your RIP. Life is a temporary gift; death is a permanent state. Use your gift wisely!

Therapy Helps

I need help with my life. I need assistance with my anger. This place will get my life straightened out, and hopefully my therapy will get through to me with my anger. And hopefully my attendance at school will improve.

-Kruger

From The Beat: What's the connection between your anger and not going to school? We think of going to school (or not) as a choice, a decision you make that is very different from losing your temper (which is not a choice as much as a reaction). We hope you make a different choice about school because there is not a question in the world that later on in life you'll recognize how valuable an education can be.

Feeling Right And Wrong

Well to me right is something that you have learned from a positive figure, something you think you feel is right. Wrong is something your positive figures consider negative, and something you truly feel is wrong.

Most of us do wrong, thinking it right because that's all we know, but other people will be thinking it wrong.

-Kruger

From The Beat: How do you think you learn from positive or negative figures in your life? Is it what they say that matters or what they do?

No Fatherly Help

I never had a father figure because my father was never in my life when I truly needed help. And I had never known anybody that I have looked up to. My brother tries to be that person, but it doesn't work because he tries to yell to get through to me, but that just makes me angrier.

-Kruger

From The Beat: We've noticed that a lot of parents or people who try to act like parents have to resort to yelling. If your brother just spoke to you, person to person, would he be more effective? Would you listen? If and when you become a father, will you yell to make your point?

A Dream Father

My father provided me with everything He provided me with the love I need, he played with me and I felt he will never betray me

I trust him to be there with me Together we would do any and everything But then I heard the alarm clock ring

I came back to reality — to the fact that there was no father there for me And every time I did, it was always in my dream

-Merced

From The Beat: You were deprived of a father but not of an imagination and the skills to express it! Well done. We hope that when (if) it comes time for you to be in that role, you'll be a real, and not an imaginary father.

I need help with being a good role model for my sister and my two brothers.

A Positive Support System

I'm leaving this place soon, moving back to my city. I want to go to the junior college, and get a job at a gym, stay positive, and not relapse. Not just on substances but with behavior, my old behavior, because when I get in that state of mind, I am very dangerous to myself and others. So getting a positive support system is very important.

I'm scared and happy, mixed feelings. I have an image of what I would like to live up to when I leave. And when I think about this stuff I find it harder and harder to believe. I 'bout to be a square, when I leave, but this is what I have to do to stay away from the system. I'm too good to be in the system. I have potential to be someone great, and that's what counts.

I'm out.

-Snow Flake

From The Beat: Your positive attitude and self-image will be your ticket out of trouble. We bet that as you see the benefits of staying positive and doing well, you'll find that being "square" has its great advantages to your future — and that you can still have a lot of fun without risking everything. Where will you be moving? What do you want to study at college? What kind of job would you like to do in the gym? We think you're headed for good things, and we are behind you all the way.

Only In California

The government spends more money on us only in Cali
If you are a minority you are guilty only in Cali
Where the true gangsters roll only in Cali
A state that has an incarceration rate higher than the world only in Cali
A place where peace is impossible only in Cali

-Jon

From The Beat: We wish you were right that these things happen only in California. You are right about the incarceration rate being the highest in the world — and if you calculate the incarceration rate for minorities alone, the numbers are off the chart! It is a disgrace, but sadly, the disgrace is shared by the entire country and not confined solely to California.

I have an image of what I would like to live up to when I leave.

The Ten Commandments

The way I define right from wrong is I base it on the Ten Commandments. I didn't have a father figure and never will. I'm strong enough to be a man and be responsible and take charge of my life. I need help with my baby momma's going away.

-Paul

From The Beat: Do the Ten Commandments help you to be a responsible adult and father? How will you take charge of your life? If you're "strong enough to be a man," where did that strength come from? Have you always had it, or is this something you've only recently developed? Do you follow every Commandment, or do you pick and choose which to follow?

Runaway Train

On my version of right from wrong is what I am doing now, like getting my life back on track. My wrong was like a train that ran off it's track, so now it is a runaway train. It can't stop, but the only thing it could do is keep on going until it slow down.

Right now my right is getting life back on track with my family, which is my real family plus my own family with my girl.

But I think my wrong is when I asked her to move in with me. The reason why I asked her that is because my girl and I is getting married soon to each other.

-Charlie

From The Beat: How do you slow that train down so that you can get control of your life? How has Walden House helped you gain that control? We don't understand why it was wrong to ask your girlfriend to move in with you when you are planning to get married. Can you explain that?

Life

Life is like
A dice game
You don't know when
You're going to crap out
The system will play you
If you don't get out
So with that
Think about it
I'm out

-Weezy

From The Beat: A game of dice is entirely chance — you have no control over what numbers come up. But with life, you make your own choices so when you make bad ones, it's just a copout to blame them on "luck" or "chance" or "the roll of the dice." Certainly, it helps to have some good luck along the way, but far more important than luck is an understanding of what helps you and what hurts you — and a determination to do the former and not the latter!

A For-Real Father

You always loved me
You always hugged me
You always cared
You always shared
You always were there
You always tried your hardest
You always came through regardless
You always knew I could do good
You always knew I'd get out the 'hood
You always told me drugs are bad
You always knew I'd get out the bag
You always knew I was a great son
You always gave me extra love

To my father who's always there
And will always be the greatest father here.

-Albert

From The Beat: It is such a wonderful thing to read your piece and feel the love you have for your father. We are so used to reading the negative — about absent fathers, fathers who abandoned their kids, fathers who beat and abused their children — that we almost forgot that there are some great fathers out there doing what they're supposed to be doing, loving and supporting their children, and making them feel that they are special. We hope you show this piece to your pops because we know it will bring tears to his eyes as it did to our eyes. We give him major props for being there for you, and we give you props for knowing and acknowledging that fact.

I Need You

I need help with anger and fear
I need help to get out of here
I need help with paint to smear
Once a canvas of hope that I hold dear
I need help with loving myself
I need drugs gone to restore my health
I need love to replace future wealth
I need you, Baby, from the 1st to the 12th
I need a river to swim fast and free
I need a canopy to hide all of me
I need the sunrise for us to see
I need wings to escape and flee
I need a cloud to float in the sky
Twist different shapes and float on by
I need you, Babe, to never ask why
I need forever for you and I

-Rob F

From The Beat: There are certain lines in this tight poem that make us curious. Why do you need to hide yourself under a canopy? Why can't you love yourself? Who is the girl you're writing to, and how has she helped you? What is it you're afraid of? You've got real skills, and we'd love to see where you take any one of these questions — or all of them.

**I need help on
respecting other
people even if
they are getting
on my nerves.**

I Want To Stop

I need help with my life. I want to stop selling and using drugs. I need help with school. I need help with my issues. I need help with my anger. I need help to get my life straight.

-Space

From The Beat: Which is the hardest problem to deal with and correct? Is it the drugs, the anger, or some other issue? Are you making progress towards getting the help you need? What do you think has helped you the most since entering Walden House?

I need help with...

What I need help with is pulling my family out of the gutta, and helping my brother understand that he's falling back into negativity. I need help with getting along with my enemies and making amends with them. I need help on helping my mom pay the bills and help her get up out the jets.

I need help on my bad manners. I need help with my school work. I need help on my anger and I need help with my female issues. What I mean by that is disrespecting them. I need help on respecting other people even if they are getting on my nerves.

I need help on provoking people for fun. And that's what I'm working on right now.

-Nifae

From The Beat: This is quite a long list to be working on, but that work will pay off if you take it seriously. The one thing we know you know, but we can't help saying anyway, is that if you do things that risk your freedom, you can't help you mom with anything. The most help you can be to her is to stay free, stay strong, get your education, and then use your knowledge to provide the material help she needs. Keep working on your problems, and you'll get there.

Doing My Program

What's up y'all. I'm over here at Walden House just chilling, trying to finish my program. I hope all my homies from YGC got out or are getting out. To all my homies, stay up.

Peace out

-Leonard

From The Beat: What do you hope to do when you finish your program at Walden House? Do you think you are better prepared to stay out of the system now than before you went in? What is the most useful thing you have learned to help you stay out?

No Freedom

Right now, basically I need help getting out of Walden House. I need to get home and be with my family. I feel like I'm wasting my life in here. I know better to not mess up again.

I feel I'm ready to leave here but I'm forced to be here longer. I'm tired of being told what to do. I'm tired of having no freedom and being told how to run my life. Right now this is the worst time of my life. But I know this is not forever. I still have the rest of my life to be free.

-Jim

From The Beat: We feel your frustration, but we also feel your determination not to mess up again, and we think that's your most powerful asset right now. Since you can't spring yourself, why not just try to chill, and get as much out of Walden House as you can so that you're even better prepared to stay out of the system when you touch down?

**I'm tired
of having
no freedom
and being
told how to
run my life.**

Your Right (I'm Wrong)

You invalidate my point of view
Act as if your truth
Is the only truth
Everyone else is wrong
Particularly me.

The many faceted diamond I'll call "Life"
Has many ways to look at it
None of which are clear

Which is why gypsies use crystals balls
You tell me no one deserves to die
Sure you're right

I tell you some people deserve to die
I'm right too

Right and wrong are up to the individual
So don't try to make me you
Obviously I'm not, so now you're wrong too.
As I said before, all rapist is and molesters
Need to die.

That is how I feel, and I could care less what you think.

I have seen too many children destroyed
And the cycle needs to end

Let me tell you one thing more
No one changes. Yeah, people can act
"I'm not like them/But I can pretend"

Applies to more than just one
You can hide yourself until you die

Once an addict, always an addict
Once a rapist, always a rapist
But you can act different

Here in the Psych Ward, we call it multiple

P.S.. Anyone who defends the rights of rapists/ molesters are called silent partners.

You know who you are, and you deserve to die as well.
End it

-Drusilla the Hun

From The Beat: If you are right, that nobody ever changes, then is there any point to Christianity or any other religion that attempts to teach a moral code? Is there any point to Walden House or any other program that attempts to make people understand their own behavior in an effort to change it? As to your certainty that your list of bad guys "deserve to die" (along with those who defend their rights), we can only reiterate that it's hard for us to know what "they" deserve (whoever the "they" might be), but we have a very clear idea that "deserving to die" and "deserving to kill" are two different things. And, since we are as certain that we don't have the right to kill as you are certain that some individuals must die, all we can do is agree to disagree.

Mrs. Wadud

Hey Mrs. Wadud, it's Ashley. I'm still in Walden House. I miss you and Ms. Westbrook. I'm only going to be here for three or four more months. I'm proud of myself because I've stayed in the program.

At first I was going to run but I realized I didn't miss you guys enough to come back for the fourth time. Well, I just wanted to let you know I'm safe and doing fine.

-Ashley

From The Beat: It is such a nice thing to acknowledge those people in your life who've helped you along the way, and this is one of the nicest. We know that both Ms. Wadud and Ms. Westbrook will be very proud of you for not running and for doing the program. And we are too.

Who Are You?

Hey guy, whoever you are who was talking about seeing me across the bar... I don't know if you're writing to me, but my name is also Ashley. So I just want to say hopefully we'll meet some day. Always,

-Ashley

From The Beat: Well, we don't know who he was writing about either, but we hope he sees what you've written and responds to your response.

I believe in the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child," because I was raised by my family and my neighborhood.

Don't Hurt Anyone

Everyone has their beliefs, but what I think is that as long as you don't hurt anyone emotionally, physically or mentally, I think it's okay.

-Brianna

From The Beat: We think your rule — don't hurt anyone — is the basis of morality, and we applaud it. People may disagree about what hurts others and what doesn't, but making the effort not to cause another human being pain is a moral choice.

Jesus Is My Father Figure

The father figure in my life is Jesus. However, neither my biological father nor mother was in my life. I believe in the saying, "It takes a village to raise a child," because I was raised by my family and my neighborhood.

I feel that if I pray every night to Jesus, he will help me get through life safely and positively. I love life and the advantages and disadvantages that come with it. He'll be there through thick and thin.

-Helen

From The Beat: It is said that "God helps those who help themselves." So, how are you helping yourself? What do you want to do when you get out of Walden House? Where do you see yourself in five year's time? We agree with you that a child benefits from the attention and love of many different people, and we think there would be fewer problems in our world if more children were raised this way.

Mistakes Mess Up A Kid's Life

Doing drugs

And hanging out with different thugs

You found a man you thought could be true

In this game it takes two

Time went by

You stopped getting high

Look what you did

Now you're stuck having a kid

You were just a dope fiend

Now you're a pregnant teen

Life gets harder, the world turns mean

Do you think your man' going to stay by your side

Or when he knows he'll be a father go run an' hide

In my conclusion, if you're going to have sex

Be sure to use protection

If you don't want a child, or some sexual infection

So remember, children don't want to feel neglected

All they want is to be protected

-Sister

From The Beat: We don't know who you are writing to, but we do know that you spit some excellent advice in this tight poem. We often wonder why so many children are having children, almost as if they didn't know what makes babies...

Do you think most young men care if they produce a child or not? What about young women? Could it be that they think having a child will an answer to problems instead of the cause? As for the possibility of getting an STD (including the incurable HIV), we just can't understand why so many would take such chances. This is real talk, and we hope other young people take it to heart.

**Remember,
no matter
how
bad the
situation
is, it can
always get
worse.**

My Role Model

A father figure has played a good role in my life. We have had our ups and downs. I had a hard time with him playing the role as my father as an older man. I am now proud to say I'm his youngest daughter.

I had good times with him this weekend. I am starting to recently understand his ways and accept him for who he is and what he does.

I'm proud of him for changing his life around. It's just so sad that my biological father couldn't change for his two girls. My step-father is a role model to me because he was able to stop using, period, and smoking cigarettes so he can make people and himself proud.

Shout out to my dad who has deceased. Thanks for bringing me into this world.

I love you, Step-Dad. You are my role model and father figure.

-Angela

From The Beat: This is such a nice tribute to the man who has been like a father to you. It is a pity that your biological father missed out on your and your sister, but it sounds to us like your step father more than made up for it. We hope you show him this, because we know he would want to see it.

Rape Is Always Wrong

Yeah, some people think it's okay to sell drugs to feed their family, but there are so many other things you can do to feed your family. I could see myself selling drugs and making quick cash, but what happens to your family when you get caught? In today's society there are consequences for your actions.

But at home with a crying baby and no money, it seems right to deal. So I guess it depends on the situation. Remember, no matter how bad the situation is, it can always get worse. So pull yourself up, or no one will.

As for the whole rape and murder thing, if someone raped me, I would want revenge. I would be out for blood. Then I would spit on their grave. But that's just me. I feel it's wrong to rape any woman. It's taking something away from her that a man, whether he be drunk or sober, will never know. No means no!

Most people learn what that means when they're young and want some candy from the store. So why is that different when you want sex?

-Monica

From The Beat: On the question of selling drugs for quick cash, the situation you present as possibly okay is having a crying baby and no money to provide. But then we have to ask you the very same question you asked in this piece: what happens when you get caught? Who takes care of that crying baby then. We don't disagree with a single thing you said about the rapist — except that taking the law into your own hands (seeking your own revenge) can land you behind bars. We're not sure why some men cannot take no for an answer, but we think it's related to a general sense of disrespect toward women that is all-too-common.

Doing It Over

I would change my mom. She is so stupid. She sits on her butt all day and watches satellite TV because the shows come on three hours earlier than cable. That's why I'm in here, because she caused me to do drugs and drink to take away the stress and actually have a little fun.

Scenario: This last Xmas there was so much stress around the house I went to my buddy's house and got really high and tried to ride my bike home. By the time I got home, I went to my room and turned on my stereo and after the effects wore off I was told somebody called the police because I was disturbing the peace.

-Pete

From The Beat: A lot of things "cause" people to try to de-stress in illegal ways, but it ain't the peeps who are causing the stress who get locked up. Are you gonna let some household stress get in the way of your freedom? What part do you play in all of this? How does your mom watching TV make you end up in the Hall? How can you escape the stress at home without risking getting locked up again?

If I Could

If I could do something different, it would probably be that I wouldn't have drank so much these past years because it has mostly gotten me locked up. I also wouldn't have messed up in school so much when they had gave me chances to do good.

About a month and a half ago, I got some new charges and I was drunk when they caught me. I was supposed to go to placement, but the judge gave me a chance. I came back two weeks later for being late to school and arguing with a teacher. I might get out, but I don't know yet. If I get out, I'm gonna do hella good, but I'm not gonna talk, I'm just gonna do it.

-Peace

From The Beat: Let's see it happen. Do you have a plan to back up your talk? How are you gonna stay away from the temptations that keep getting you locked up?

Running From The Truth

My biggest thing that I have been running from was not having a father. That's the only thing that I have missed in my life. I don't know what it would really be like because my father has been in prison all my life. I don't want that to happen to me, so I am not going to let that bring me down and I am going to keep my head straight.

-Chris

From The Beat: How are you gonna stay out of the system? How are you gonna be there for your kids, the way that you wish your father was for you?

My Problem

What's my problem? Well, my problem is drugs. Drugs are the gateway to all the crimes that I commit. I get out of JSC and try and get high by trying to fool my PO by smoking whatever it was right after my PO checked up. But that was my problem, I always try to go against the grain. I needed to know what I know now, and that is to go with the grain, and run with the system, and you will eventually get out. I'll just keep riding until my problem is solved.

-Justin

From The Beat: What is going with the grain mean to you? Is it staying legal? Sober? Not lying? What do most people do to stay out of incarceration? How are you going to follow that grain when times get hard?

I'm gonna do hella good, but I'm not gonna talk, I'm just gonna do it.

Lo Que Creo Correcto

Aqui los saluda Magic. Yo pienso que robarle a los que tienen feria para los pobres no es tan malo, porque los ricos prefieren darle de comer bien a un perro que darle de comer a un pobre.

También es bueno vender drogas cuando lo haces por necesidad. Hay persona que comen de ese dinero ilegal. A eso es que le llaman la vida loca.

From The Beat: La verdad es que aunque uno haga dinero, o use ese dinero para algo bueno, no es correcto vender drogas, porque aunque lo estén haciendo por una buena causa, estas destruyendo las vidas de los demás, hasta talvez hasta tu propia familia.

What I Think Is Right

What's up? My name is Magic. I think that stealing from the rich for the poor is not such a bad thing, because the rich prefer to see a dog eat well than give a poor man something to eat.

Also, selling drugs is a good thing if you're doing it out of necessity. There are people who eat because of that dirty money. That's why they call it "the crazy life."

-Jacob, Marin

Voices In Spanish

Lo Que Es Bueno Y Malo

Q-vo Raza. Soy el Mousie. Como se la estan pasando torcido? Pues estoy chido porque conoci a una haina bien chula, pero lo malo es que ya no la voy a mirar, y por otra parte está bien que salga de la juvenile.

Pues el vender droga es tan malo porque ganas mucho dinero pero para otros si porque uno puede llegar a morir cuando les dan el pason. A la vez es bueno porque te relaja, te pone bien chido, te sientes que estas volando, pero cuando le da el pason andan llorando. Por eso yo no uso drogas.

From The Beat: Que ondas carnal. ¿Dinos un poco más de ella? ¿Te corresponde? ¿Crees que por el amor de una mujer alguien sea capaz de cambiar? Amigo, en ciertas cosas nosotros te damos la palabra, pero no creemos que vender drogas, en otras palabras envenenando a los demás sea correcto. La drogas no te van a resolver tus problemas, ten presente lo que te decimos.

What Is Good And What Is Bad

What's up my people? It's me, Mousie. How has your time locked up been? Well, I'm very juiced because I met a top-notch female, but the bad thing is I won't be seeing her again, and, on another note, it's all right that I get out of Juvenile.

Well, selling drugs is not that bad because you make a lot of money, but for other people, it is bad because they can die off of overdosing. On one hand, it is good because it relaxes you, it gets you pumped, and you feel like you are flying, but when they overdose, they start crying. That's why I do not use drugs.

-Juan, Marin

Mi Padre Ha Sido Lo Máximo

Hay personas que se han criado en las calles, sin padres, sin ninguna educación e ingenier drogas y eso fue los que los llevó a matar, violar y a muchas cosas más.

Mi padre ha sido lo máximo para mí. El me ha criado, me ha dado una buena educación desde pequeño, él me apoya en los buenos y malos momentos y nunca me ha tratado mal. Al contrario, él me trata como un buen padre.

Hay veces que nosotros no les hacemos caso y uno dice que va a salir a dar una vuelta, pero allá donde ellos no nos miran es ahí donde hacemos cosas incorrectas.

From The Beat: Que bien que tienes un gran ejemplo de padre a tu lado, alguien que ha estado siempre por ti. Estas en lo cierto muchos de ustedes estan aqui por no hacer caso, y más cuando le dijeron que no fueran, es cuando menos caso hicieron. Cuida a tu padre, y no dejes que se llebe una mala expresión.

My Dad Has Been Everything To Me

There are people who have been raised in the streets without parents, without any form of education, inhaling drugs, and that's what makes them kill, rape, and many other things.

My father has been everything to me. He has raised me. He has provided me with very good education since I was little. He supports me through good and bad times and he has never treated me wrong. On the contrary, he treats me like a good father should.

There are times when we do not listen to our parents and we say we are going to go outside, but when we're outside and out of sight, that's when we start to do bad things.

-Acosto B5, SF/YGC



SUNMANSLIGHT

This piece by SunMansLight sheds light on the worsening situation in California's prisons. Describing the "get tough" approach that just keeps getting worse, with its numbing effects on prisoners' souls, he reminds us that most will re-enter society more bitter and unprepared to deal with it than when they left it for prison. He wonders if it isn't all a deliberate policy to break men down. This is a man who's been around the track more than once, an OOG who speaks from bitter experience. (We just received a letter from him chronicling the eight days in June during which Salinas Valley State Prison, where he resides, found their water source was contaminated, and were rationing water while confining prisoners to their cells.)

Corrupt or Corrupt

Recently I spoke with Mark Martin of the San Francisco Chronicle newspaper. Our conversation lasted no more than ten minutes over telephone before Mr. Martin suddenly ended our conversation leaving me wondering how what I was sharing with him was received. He did tell me he would be in future contact.

Of course, we discussed prison conditions and events that are of interest to the media right now — until something else comes along that will sell more newspapers and magazines.

The upcoming "no smoking policy" that will take effect on or before January 01, 2004, and has not got the attention I feel it deserves, I was unable to discuss with Mr. Martin as time did not permit. I have a considerable amount of concern as to the true goal of the Department of Corrections as it implements this policy.

While State Correction Officials claim such a policy will save California taxpayers "millions of dollars in health care costs each year," will it, and is that its primary purpose?

Or could this new policy be no more than another silent step of many the CDC has already taken toward assuring inmates live within an environment so restrictive, so emotionally and psychologically devastating it aids in possibly "brain washing" inmates?

Could it possibly be next phase in a plan formulated within the DOC several years back to form a population of inmates in which their guards' primary duty will soon consist of little more than watching over broken, numb men so destroyed by their experience here they leave totally dependent upon society's mental health and welfare programs because they are no longer able to care for themselves?

Before you toss this to the side with the thought "some crazy" has written it, please read it through.

Years back I wrote an article that was published on "Brain Washing and Breaking of The Spirit." It described the process to accomplish it and its long-term effects. I wrote it when it became obvious to me my jailers were up to something more than their usual abusive treatment of inmates inside level three and four prisons.

Then-governor Pete Wilson paved the way by stripping from us what was known as the prisoner bill of rights. He did this without first seeking approval from the courts that supported this bill, which better protected inmates from becoming victims of sadistic and violent guards. Actually, in theory, it protected us from a long list of abuses too many to list here.

With a simple swift stroke of his pen, Wilson opened the long closed door, without scrutiny of media, since prisoners were no longer allowed contact with news reporters without first going through a near impossible process put in place by the CDC afterwards, for the Department of Corrections to inform its inmates they must all begin to wear similar clothing, identical short haircuts, be at all times clean shaven (and to tell anyone questioning the new policy that its purpose is to "enforce personal hygiene.")

With these new "rules" in place, the systematic destruction of one's very important, in most cultures, sense of individuality began.

Next, another policy was issued which informed inmates they were no longer allowed to display personal photographs inside their cell, nor use "clotheslines" to

hang wet clothes to dry, and personal property was to be limited to what would fit inside a 1x2x3-foot steel box bolted to cell walls. In other words, the cells were at all times to appear bare.

One by one, all "privileges" were then eliminated. The first two were the boxing and weightlifting programs, which served to teach inmates how to properly rid themselves of frustration and aggression. Then the eight hours each day allowed outside on the prison yard became four hours, then two, and now it is two hours every other day.

Most job and vocational trade assignments were eliminated other than those essential to running the prisons, such as janitorial, food services and some "Prison Industries." This left more than 135,000 inmates without jobs, without tasks to occupy and stimulate them.

Families who were once allowed to enter prison seven days a week to visit their incarcerated loved ones were informed "visiting" would be reduced to four days a week. Soon, it became three days. Recently under the guise of a "budget crisis," it became two days. As the result, tens of thousands of family members and inmates have been effectively denied physical contact with one another.

Inmates were once given by the DOC (as was budgeted for, and still is), items necessary to keep himself and his cell clean. Again, under the guise of budget problems, most of these items have been severely limited. Others have been eliminated altogether, such as disinfectant, cleanser, and rags with which we were once able to clean our cells, toilets and sinks.

If we are lucky, and the "weekly" allotment of "supplies" arrive at the prison, we are now given a 1/4 ounce bar of soap with which we are expected to wash ourselves, our personal clothing and our cells. On rare occasions, we are given a 1/4-ounce tube of toothpaste.

If we use up the roll of toilet paper we are given weekly, we are told to use our fingers.

For several years now, prisoners have been periodically locked inside their cells for periods lasting up to twenty months, as the media recently exposed happened at Folsom. Through the past fourteen months here at Salinas Valley State Prison, we have been confined to our cells, twenty-four hours a day, a total of nearly eight months.

While the media reporters and the "bleeding hearts" (as prison "reformers" are referred to by prison administrators) are told these lockdowns are for the "safety and security of the institution, staff and inmates while an ongoing investigation continues," inmates are denied all access to the prison canteen.

It is at the canteen where prisoners with money on their "account" can buy, and share with others, detergent, bath soap, toothpaste, shampoo, toothbrushes, and skincare products, as well as writing paper, pencils, envelopes and postage stamps. (Inmates with funds on their account cannot obtain "free postage." As a result, most of us during these lengthy lockdowns are unable to correspond with those in the outside world.)

Therefore, months into these lockdowns, every prisoner becomes totally dependent upon his guards to supply him with "minimal necessities."

Further, during these lockdowns we are not allowed to make phone calls, and there are lengthy delays, between three to six weeks, at times longer, in which prisoners are not given correspondence mailed to them from the outside.

Visiting was always suspended during lockdowns,

The time to fix something that is broken is while it's in the repair shop, not after.

SUNMANSLIGHT (CONT.)

continued from previous page

but that practice raised considerable public outcry because it was happening so often. It is now rarely halted.

With this, now that inmates are separated from all they have known to be "normal" throughout their lives and no longer surrounded by supporters consisting of family and friends, sleep deprivation appears to become our captors' goal. From the early morning to late night, we are constantly yelled at. Throughout the night there are blaring "announcements" over the intercom system. Guards constantly walk by our cells whistling, talking loudly, striking the bars and doors with their batons, allowing any equipment they carry to bang loudly together.

As unnecessary as this activity obviously is, could it be part of a plan to systematically "break down" human beings? Whatever the reason, along with the cumulative events I have listed to this point, it leaves a prison population psychologically and emotionally defeated over time, and dependent upon their jailers to care for them in every conceivable way. At that point, "based upon an individual's behavior," it is determined who will be given a "privilege," and who will not.

This is brainwashing in its simplest form. Many may state it is not, and attempt to explain it is no more than necessary consequences to "control" the prisoners, but the reality is there are many other avenues to oversee and control a prison population without destroying lives.

History has proven brainwashing leaves a trail of broken human beings, who will doubtfully ever again be productive, self-supporting individuals, who will forever more be dependent upon the goodness and generosity of other people, and who will be a drain upon society's resources.

These men and women will be released back into society, as eighty-five percent of all convicted felons will be again, and what will not be obvious is their well-hidden frustration and anger.

Long before they, or someone else, can seek out the professional help needed to reverse — if indeed it is reversible — the damage done, the prisoner will have failed in his attempt to integrate back into society. He will have returned to prison as one of the statistical seventy-six percent of the 125,000 California inmates paroled each year who violate the conditions of their parole or commit a new criminal act.

(Also note: there are 25,000 inmates presently serving life sentences under the Three Strikes law, all who had been on parole at some time.)

The California prison system has been a failure since its conception, and it is not the prisoners alone who suffer as the result. Often more importantly — depending upon what side of the fence you are on — it fails those members of society who depend upon the California Department of Corrections to protect them from convicted felons.

Release an angry, confused, frustrated human being from prison, who is often suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and that person will victimize innocent people again.

I think it's also notable and telling, the amazing difference in attitude, outlook and demeanor of inmates depending upon the prison facility in which they are incarcerated. Those serving their sentences at Level One and Two prisons appear to have lives filled with hope for a future that will not include further incarceration, and their overall conduct reflects that.

Could this be in part because they are not confined inside cells for indefinite periods of time, work at job assignments, learn vocational trades to prepare them for

release, enjoy daily recreational activities, eat food that has not been watered down, interact with guards who are not threatening and abusive, and are participating within an environment that is conducive to rehabilitation?

Enter Levels Three and Four here at Salinas Valley State Prison, and observe the opposite. Here you will see the wolf in a cage staring back at you, no recognition of your humanity. He sees nothing more than a shape, and is wondering how to get at it. There will be an obvious and notable strength, but it is purely predatory. There is none of the softness of morality or conscience, only strength and will.

Our keepers might explain that this is the reason for the different Levels. In theory, understandable, in "fact," it is a system bent on breaking the spirits of these men.

The CDC has created a prison environment in which they cultivate psychological and emotional repression. Beware! The often subservient demeanor one observes in its prisoners is but a surface appearance, serving much like a dam holding back all manner of repressed rage and frustration.

That dam occasionally leaks in an orderly controlled way that is most often ignored by the prison administrators for the warning it is. When that dam breaks, and it most assuredly will, the waters of rage, frustration, and tormented souls will sweep uncontrolled, down through and over the valley before it, leaving a wide path of death and destruction that did not need to happen. Torture the prisoner, and he will fight like a tiger, relentlessly, viciously. The most gentle and tender of spirits are always the most terrible when they fight for the sake of their soul.

Most often, the DOC sets the stage for prisoner unrest and violence, creating an intense need in those incarcerated to secure a safe private space inside prison, and it runs deep. For it is in that space we struggle to keep our sanity. Prevalent circumstances mold the need for such a sanctuary into something appearing, and may well be, psychologically irrational — until those who observe this phenomenon understand how the California penal system makes this so.

For the most part, the world outside deals with invasion of their space with indignation. The incarcerated are forced to deal with it in a manner that is often violent, and with deadly consequences. How else can we save whom we are when our keepers will not let us be?

Politicians, in cohort with big business, astoundingly profitable for its DOC employees who make up one of this country's most powerful unions, has somehow convinced gullible citizen taxpayers that there are no other ways to deal with "the problem."

In truth, there are a number of ways to approach "the problem" that would end the abuse of society's outlaws, and better serve California's law-abiding citizens.

I am certain there would be many, should they read what I have written here, who would assume these words are no more than the ramblings of a paranoid schizophrenic with "too much time on his hands," someone with "an axe to grind." That is exactly what prison administrators said when my non-fiction book about the California Youth Authority was published. Yet everything I wrote about the abuse of children in that system thirteen years ago has recently been proven true, and continues today.

Writings of a man gone mad or a penal system gone amuck?

Whatever anyone's take on our penal system, one fact should stand out above all else: The time to fix something that is broken is while it's in the repair shop, not after.

YOUNGSTER

We've been waiting for a piece like this from the very talented Youngster for a very long time. (You got shipped out of YGC and off to the CYA's Preston before we got a chance to say good-bye and good luck.) Youngster has been a Beat star for a long time, but has never quite known whether to put his feet down on the well-worn path that kept leading him back to the Hall, or to start an entirely new path — the one he lays out in this remarkable piece of thinking and writing. If you were still in the unit, Joel, this would definitely be a POW! We are so proud of the message you spit here, and appreciate that you are directing it at yourself as much as any other "hardhead" . . . As your thinking and understanding unfold, we hope you'll share it all with The Beat. Thank you, Youngster.

To The Hardheads

Well I'm back, but just on a different page like I might've said before I moved on from YGC. I'm now in another three-letter institute: CYA.

It's funny in a weird sort of way because I said that I would never come to this place. But I'm not so lucky. As a young buck I was always out to get in trouble, lookin' for somebody to beat up, lookin' for some type of shhh to get into, just lookin' to make money. But my half thoughts only brought me fast good times and long stretches of despair.

My momma got sick of my shhh at a young age, so I started to live on the streets not caring about anything, being a hoodlum, taking everything to the extreme — not caring even for myself.

I'm not worried about that anymore. That's just the way it is. I can't change it. The only thing that made me, in a way, to slow my role, has to be my children. They made me sit down and think — think about shhh that I was putting myself into. Not that it stopped at the very moment, neither.

Do any of you younger homies know what you getting yourselves mixed into? Do you really want to live this way for a major chunk in your lives? I chose this way because I had to. Nothing else was available, and if you thuggin' for that very reason, do what you gots to, because I undastand. Life isn't nowhere near perfect.

I'm not trying to preach to none of y'all, neither,

because it ain't even like that. I love all my hoodlums. I just want all the hardheads to be able to realize that there is so much more out in the world than just sellin' dope, and postin' on a corner. You just have to figure out.

All of us are conformists. We conform to the constraints that our so-called political leaders think of us. People from low-budget neighborhoods, aka the ghetto, are all figured to be gangstas and thugs. We make their statistics, not the other way around. We — or should I should I say I — tried to make easy money to get out of the 'hood, but got caught up in the shackles of material greed.

Many nights I have thought this through, turned it over in my mind, wondering why I did these things. Yeah, first I blamed it on my no-show pops, and my momma that never loved, but I had to dig deeper. I realized that I wanted this life. I could've chose something different, gone to school, improved myself over time, but I declined that option and built my thug mentality. Now I have regrets, not only because I didn't go to school and learn, but because I didn't teach myself anything but how to sell dope.

I'm bettering myself now. I'm trying to holla at the hardheaded homies, the ones that don't learn like me 'til it's too late. I have other things that helped me look at my life. To Denise, the one female that stuck by my side through thick and thin, I love you. Soon, I'm going to put a ring on your finger. To my two children, daddy's coming home one day. I don't got life.

But also to my hardheaded homies, learn before it's too late. I'll be back. One luv.

THE MIND

Because we have known "The Mind" for a long time in these pages — he used to call himself Professor Blackmind, then Poetic Blackmind, and he organized many other writers to contribute to our pages under the general name Poetic Mindz Family. This terribly sad piece reflects our friend as his lowest point, calling on God to hurry his ultimate fate. Yet, for those who are relatively new to this publication, take our word for it that this young man is not now, nor ever has been, a bum, even if he's forced to live like one. If "The Mind" sees this (while he wrote this from a Sacramento County juvenile lockup, he's is again on the streets), we want to remind him of the soaring power and hope of his earlier poetry, and to tell him that he won't always feel as low as he feels today.

Forsaketh Him

Chapter One

I stopped talking to my mom about six months ago. I wasn't sure if she still had love for me. I was locked up for two years straight (from the age 16 to 18, the age I am now). I knew that I wouldn't have a place to stay when I got out of Juvenile Hall in 2003, because my mom and step-dad was living in a broke-down mobile home in South Sacramento, and they couldn't even afford to keep that.

My mom kicked my older brother out and he started living out of his car. That's when I knew that times were going to get rough. I got released from Juvi in October, 2003, (a week before my 18th birthday), and that's when I became a bum.

Both my brother and my step-dad got locked up and sent to the pen' for a long time. My mom was staying with her friend (who didn't have enough room for me to stay there). I began to live in my step-dad's broke-down van for a couple of weeks until the most unfortunate thing happened . . . the van got towed because it was left abandoned in the local K-Mart parking lot. Actually, I'm not even sure if the van was towed or if somebody stole it, but I know I lost everything (clothes, shoes, money), everything I owned

was in that van, and I never recovered them.

That night I slept at the bus stop trying to stay half awake in case some crazy tried to sneak up on me. I was officially a bum. Ever since then, I been sleeping in abandoned cars, parks, and friends' houses (rarely) because I couldn't get a job until I recovered my ID and other documents.

I became a drug addict and often contemplated suicide. I tried doing music, but producers wouldn't let me in the studio because my clothes were dingy and I was dirty from not having enough money to buy things. I felt like my mom had forsaken me because when I told her about the van being towed, she seemed to care more about how my step-dad would feel about it instead of how her 18-year-old son was going to survive on the streets. That hurt me a lot, and I began to feel like I had nobody to lean on.

My mom is the only family I have, and even she turned her back on me. It hurts as I write these words. Times is much harder when you gotta face them alone. My mom has her friends and my brothers. I have no one. That's why sometimes I wish God would stop stalling and pull the plug on me, because there ain't much for me to live for.

(To be continued . . .)

JESSE Jesse first started writing for The Beat when he was in San Luis Obispo County's Juvenile Services Center (JSC). He was transferred to CYA in November 2003, but continues to contribute to The Beat through his letters. We're excited to have Jesse's voice back in The Beat.

Finally Here

Well, I guess I'm finally here in YA, a place I never thought I would be. To me, all this looks like is one of those prison movies I used to always watch on TV when I was younger.

You should see how the cells are. When you walk in, all you see is tagging all over the walls, writings on the sink, toilet and even the floor. The bunk beds are so small that the person on the bottom (which is me) has to have a hunched back to write all the time, unless you lay down. And the funny thing is you got to watch your roommate make weird faces while he's taking a crap. And most of the day we're in our boxers because these cells are hot during the day. And it's crazy how people yell out of their cell 24-7: Where they're from, who they're gonna beat up next, and trying to find out who's coming in next.

You can't really see out your room because the window has this crisscross gate on it. We come out one hour during the day, and one more hour at night, and the rest of the day we're in our rooms.

Our showers are like about two minutes. One minute to fill your body up with soap and the other minute to rinse your body off with water. But I guess I'm starting to get used to it.

The hard part about all this is that most people that are in gangs have an enemy here, so fights happen a lot. And to be straight up with you, I don't have no enemy here. Everybody gets along with me.

I came at a good time, and my time is finally starting. I got ten months; it might seem like a long time, but it's better than 18 months. I'm just trying my best to prove this place wrong, because I know I could get out of here the right way without getting caught up in any little bullshhh. I'm doing my best to change.

Aye, this lock-up shhh ain't for me anymore. I always thought it made me a bigger person to do time, but I guess I was wrong, and I'm trying to learn from my mistakes. And I've opened my eyes a lot more. I told you the kind of person I am, and I was just trying to be straight up with you.

I have a lot of heart and I care about what everybody has to say. And when I write, I try to open my mind to everybody so they won't end up in a place like this. And I just wanted to let you know that it feels good when I write. I get the little jiggles in my stomach writing this, but that's a good thing.

Different World

I see new faces come, and I see old faces go, some doing a year, others doing 10-15 years. But here in YA, there's no time limit when you're going home, because if you're caught up in the gang life, the gang life in CYA will catch up with you sooner or later.

I know that most of you with CYA commitments say to yourself, one year ain't nothing. But when you get here, one year turns into two years, maybe five years. And here it's not about trying to do time, it's about how you could handle your time and looking out for your own. Because if you got enemies while you're here, it's up to you how you want to handle it. Either this place will help you open your eyes more, or it could be harder and harder for yourself. You don't need to come to YA to prove yourself, because that's how the YA system gets you caught up.

In here, we don't have a time, or a date to depend on, because even though time flies by quick, you're wasting your own life. So from me to you, learn before you make your mistakes, or try your best to learn from them. Because the ones that could stay out of jail without being on probation and getting caught up with gang or drugs, those are the down ones. If you think being locked up proves that you're down, you're wrong. You only get one mom and one father in this life. Try your best to make them proud of you.

I Don't Know

It's kind of weird watching days fly by so quick when I'm locked up. I try to think of what I would be doing if I was out right now. And the sad part is, I don't know. I ask myself, would I still be doing the same old thing or will I finally get my shhh together?

I lie on my bunk and try to daydream about all the stupid stuff I used to do. Sometimes I smile and sometimes I don't. But I know the more I try to daydream about things, they're all like a big blur to me, or better yet, like a flashback, and even though I try to daydream, sometimes I say to myself, "I'm wasting my life."

This lock up stuff ain't for me and it ain't for nobody. We all got people that care about us; it's just we're a little hard-headed and we need to try to open our eyes more before it's too late.

Think

It's weird seeing people talk about being proud of being locked up. But I know as soon as they're in their cell, they wish that they were home. I know most of you that have been in and out of these halls I could relate to. But now I'm sitting in the Youth Authority because I ran out of chances.

I've been in your spot a few times. Saying to myself, "When I get out, I'm gonna change and stop doing all the things I used to do." But when you get out, it's a different story. And most of you know that all your lock up days are a big blur to you. Just like they were for me. But sooner or later, the little things catch up with you, and then you're gonna be facing real time.

Just think, would you like to be sitting in YA wondering who's gonna be hitting you up next, eating soup from hot water in your sink, watching your roommate take a crap right in front of you with tagging all over the room (and I mean all over), hearing people 24-7 yell out their cell who's gonna get beat up next? And trust me, the gang mentality here is probably just like being in the streets with your enemies.

Most of you just hear of the YA, but never really know what it's like till you get here. To all of you, you guys think you have friends on the outs, but from me to you, "You don't." And maybe some of you guys need to come to YA to open your eyes more.

Don't ever try to prove yourself to other people, because deep down inside, that's a low person. Always be who you are and who you want to be. And don't ever give up on yourself because people don't fall, we give up.

So those of you getting sent to group homes or drug counseling, don't ever depend on group homes or NA/ AA classes is gonna change you. You need to change on you own and pick yourself up, because nobody is gonna do your time but you. So just think about that, and think about your loved ones.

FATSO

The following poems were written by Fatso, who found out about The Beat from our old friend, Duc Nguyen. Fatso, who tells us he is a 22-year-old black male raised in Sacramento who hangs with Chinese, is currently writing from the State Correctional Training Facility in Soledad, CA. We're happy to be sharing his fine poetry with you.

Hang For

Every day I long for you . . .
Your smile, your touch, my lips against your soft lips,
And the way you move your hips.
The warmth of your embrace
The feel of your body against mine.
And the sight of your beautiful face . . .
I long for your love, and good lovemaking
I wish I had you by my side.
So we could make love until the sunrise.
I long for you so much throughout the night,
to where it makes me cry . . .
I love and miss you, I really do.
I have never met a woman so real and true.
I never thought that I'd feel this way towards
a woman until I met you.
The day I saw your face, the sight of your beauty took my
breath away.
It's like you're an angel sent down from heaven.
The angel I have longed for all my life.
And I thank God for you each and every night . . .
Now that I'm away, I'm back to longing,
but now that I know you, I miss you dearly, You're my darling
angel whom I'll love with all my heart.
And even though we don't have each other physically,
I know we have each other mentally.
And though we've for apart spiritually
We've in each other's heart . . .

Post Script

I am a 22-year-old black male, that hangs with Chinese,
I was born in Seaside, and raised in Sacramento, CA.
Well I just wanted to say what's up you all my people
that is doing time, and sending my love to all my folks'
from Seaside and Sacramento. Stay up and much love . .
. Fatso-low fu. I hope these poems will come for months
to come. Or until I move to a level 2 . . .

Life

The life that we live, the things that we do, the things that we did.
All the pain and suffering.
All for what? It seems all for nothing!
To I sit back and think of all my loved ones that are no longer here.
All my peers that I have lost throughout the years
to the life that we live so gangstas that only causes us tears,
Now that I have a family, I have something to live for, but also
something to fear.
The fear is not being here
Some days I sit and think, are my days near?
At night I pray to the Lord for forgiveness for all the dirt I done did
All I ask from the Lord is before He takes me away,
to please let me raise my kids . . .
Life is so precious, but also so short
We have so little time and it seems
that we let it all waste away.
Not knowing if we will live to see another day.
There is still so much, I must realize
and so much that I want to do before I die.
But at this moment I'd like to thank God for my kids,
family, and friends!

Just Fire

Why can't we just live and exist?
That would be simple.
To not have to worry about things.
It would be so beneficial.
But instead, we go through so much trouble just to
breathe,
A constant struggle without the means to succeed.
Every day we wake up to hustle and fight.
Trying to maintain and survive.
without the tools to understand life.
We look to the ones that come before us for advice.
Hoping for answers, guidance, or some type of insight.
We have been left hanging in the wind,
With no maps on how to begin or to prepare for the end.
Why can't we just live and exist?
Well, before we can answer that question.
We have to ask ourselves this:
Is existing living?

Thoughts . . .

You are the one that I been thinking of.
When your name comes to mind,
it's like a drug that cures my pain
and helps me overcome my fears.
Thinking about the times we shared together
over the years.
From the good times to the bad,
shall forever remain in my heart.
It seems as if you're the cure, but also the reason it starts.
This pain that I feel inside
accumulates as each day goes by,
To think of your beautiful face and gentle touch brings
tears to my eyes
It seems as if all I have left are memories,
and as time goes by
I wonder if you would still remember me,
or move on with your life and find someone new, that will
take my place,
and help you to erase my face
From the beautiful picture that we once made as a couple.
I guess these are the thoughts that trouble my mind,
break my heart, and brings tears to my eyes.
I can never picture living life without you.
You are my inspiration and my motivation, which helps me
make it through life.
You are my everything,
who makes each and every moment just right.
With your warm embrace, the soft touch of your lips, or
even the smile on your face.
These are the things that I'm lacking,
and the reason I'm acting this way.
But your beautiful face
could never be eased from my mind,
But all it is a sweet memory of how things used to be.
So tell me, babe,
are you going to let these memories fade away,
or look forward to our better days?
Before you answer that question,
just know that all these thoughts are what love put us
through.
And deep down in my heart, I know that you
will remain faithful and true . . .
So no matter what, I will always love you!
And look forward to our better days together.

MICHAEL Michael started participating in Beat Within workshops at San Luis Obispo's JSC back in 2002. We're happy to continue printing his work, which he now writes from his placement at Sierra Ridge.

A Lesson In Love

Love! What is love? Is love a useless emotion that shoots arrows through the heart? Or is love worth working for?

Love can mean both. Some can mistake love as a game or a toy that they choose to play with whenever they want. They think love only means sex and nothing else. They don't respect you as you, they respect you for what they want, and when they're done, they toss you to the side like you were dirt, a piece of trash, something that got old and boring.

The people who respect you for what you are, are true. They love you for what you truly can be. They don't just want sex. They need someone to care for them and someone to care for.

The people who are truly in love, for love, are the ones that will do anything for you, they won't ignore you, use you, or even toy with you because they respect the passion involved in love. If you behave lovingly to other people, they will behave lovingly to you. If you love someone, you cannot see any faults in that person. Life is more pleasant when people treat each other lovingly. If you love someone, you should accept everything and everyone that the person loves.

People who are in love will overcome any obstacles in order to be together. "All's fair in love and war." "Love begets love." "Love is blind." "Love makes the world go round." "Love will find a way."

So what is LOVE? Love's another useless emotion that clogs life's path. Anger and hate are only stumbling blocks, but love, love raises mountains in our path, mountains too steep to climb. When you find love you lose everything else. It leaves the inside of you hollow when the person you love ultimately rejects you. Love is useless and empty.

If I could, I would block any and all emotions. If I did, I would be a millionaire by thirty-five. I would make my job my life with nothing holding me down. I don't need love or sensation. I want to break away and be free.

Open A Door

Open a door and you will see the sky
which is just like me

The gray is my anger

The blue is my sorrow

The sunshine is the happiness that I borrow

And the rains are the tears that I shed every
tomorrow

Open a door and you will see
nothing but the inside of me

Advice

The advice I have received, I only thought it was stupid until it actually meant something to me. In the way of cupid, heaven sent a message, so as you read what I have to say, don't take it as a lesson, you'll understand what I mean, you'll understand the things to listen to and the things you don't. 'Cause as the saying goes, "Don't believe everything you hear and only half of what you see."

The reason I can honestly say these things is because I've done some of the things you might be doing or might have done. I've been down the road less traveled and ended up in a place well known. So if you choose to be lost in time, remember the things I have said because, like you, I was warned once before, and as I warn you, before you do something that's stupid, or worse than something you've done, straighten that arrow so you can fly a straighter path.

Life is more pleasant when people treat each other lovingly.

JILLIAN From her juvenile lock up in Durango, Arizona, Jillian comes at us for the second time, with her warning of the consequences of ignoring the chance you might get to change your ways. She got out, found herself hanging back with the same friends that got her into trouble to begin with, and here she is again.

Running From The Truth

This is the second time I've wrote the Beat Within, also the second time I've been here in Durango Juvenile Facility. Last time I wrote, I was getting out on May 11, 2004 — my birthday — and got out.

The first two days went great until my old friends found out I got released and started coming over, and my dad got mad and kicked me out. So I was back on the streets again for another round of the game. Got back on the racks to stay alive, did eight fat lines to keep the high. Being drunk and high off everything you think seven days a week. Staying with guys you don't even remember meeting thinking, "It's okay. I'm just fine. I'm still alive."

Watching eight-year-olds during the day to stay low and make money. They asking why the air smells funny. I respond, "It's just herbs, no need to worry."

Drinking forty after forty, can't forget the Jager. Just making sure those guys get what they paid for.

I kept thinking the system can't catch me; I'm invisible. Walking up to Diamond Shamrock with the little girl I'm watching still getting guy's numbers, and lighting up cigarettes at the age of fourteen. I wish I would get a visitor or phone call. And only after being on the run for three weeks getting caught by your father while three other cop cars follow.

Running in the middle of Grand Ave. and knocking 5-0s over. Having my own father put my hands behind my back as po-pos pile on top of the other on my back. Yeah, I was running from the truth. My family doesn't accept my calls or letters and doesn't bother to visit.

So if you have another chance, use it, don't abuse it like I did. It's bad enough the staff knew who I was. Thank you.

ANGEL PATRICK BOYAR

Angel Patrick Boyar, an inmate of Corcoran State Prison, has written an insightful and compassionate essay advising California Governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, about how to alleviate California's incredible debt, and how to renegotiate the prison and juvenile justice systems of the state. We hope you enjoy reading Boyar's as much as we have.

**An Open Letter To The Governor
And All Citizens Of America**

The state budget crisis in California is not an isolated fiscal phenomenon that appeared on its own, as some mysterious market forces of supply and demand forced the state to borrow more money from loan companies and private financiers. And then the state, to pay back its loans, raises taxes on the people.

It can be a little confusing to decipher all the political double-talk surrounding the state of the economy and why and how California and America is in an economic crisis and is really financially bankrupt, with debts in the billions of dollars that citizens will never be able to pay back in a hundred years. Californians will only be going deeper into debt as the years go by, because our money and banking system is designed to exploit and plunder the livelihood of the citizenry, as outlined in "Usury/Occult Economics."

The budget problems of California are just an extension of the economic crisis of America, and solving the budget crisis of California is not going to happen without attacking the essence of financial capitalism, which is usury: the lending of money at interest! No selling bonds or raising taxes is going to even begin to pay back the loans Californians and the citizens of this country owe to loan companies and private financiers.

It will take people with heart and guts in this country to take the necessary action of another American revolution, or we will remain in hock and debt to the money aristocracy of this nation.

"Usury/Occult Economics" is a blueprint for direct action that alone will solve the economic crisis in America, and citizens should not be frightened to stand up and act upon the Constitution, which encourages and gives legal right to citizens to abolish any tyrannical concentration of power in our Republic.

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger came into office as a political maverick, with promises to take care of California's money problems, because he said, "I know how to run a business," meaning that he knows how to finance and budget money so that profits and fortune are made, not debt and bankruptcy. But now we know his blueprint for economic recovery is no better or no different than his predecessor, former Governor Grey Davis. No budget, no pay, and the bond measure is a mockery and a joke.

If Governor Schwarzenegger means business and is really in the know about how and why there is a money crisis in California and America, then why not go to the root of the problem and step on the toes of those super-gangsters who high-jacked the economy?

President John Kennedy issued an executive order while in office to restore the issuing of constitutional money, to take back the issuing power from the Feds and this is why he was assassinated. He had the heart and guts to stand up against the money power. It takes no special intelligence to read between the lines of major events in history. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who was an insider, said it best, "In politics, if anything happens, you can bet that it was planned to happen that way."

I mean, if I were a super-gangster who stole the purse of a nation and high-jacked its economy and some legitimate ruler was threatening to take back the wealth and power I stole and give it back to its rightful owners, I would have to believe that "Lone Gunman Theory" about J.F. Kennedy's assassination.

Let the governor step on the toes of those who are illegally hoarding the wealth and power of California and this nation, and he will be dealt with accordingly. Yet, this should not frighten the governor to do the right thing, if he truly is a man of principle and not another shark or pawn in the insidious game of realpolitik, where the business of the state and nation all revolves around who has and controls the money, or, as another super-gangster put it, "He who owns he gold, rules the world."

Let's see if the governor really is who he is claiming to be, a man of principle and benefactor of humanity, not just another clever wolf in sheep's clothing. Let the governor, if he has any heart and guts, take the kind of action a real populist statesman would and let the governor go after the same money power as did J.F. Kennedy and other presidents and populists who also were killed for confronting the money aristocracy that will brook no opposition.

The kind of political/economic crisis that Californians and Americans are facing calls for extraordinary people who are not frightened to stand up to wicked principalities and evil rulers in high places. As one former British statesman put it, "The only thing for evil to triumph is that good men sit down and do nothing."

The governor needs to know that if he is out to be a lion, he can't get there by pussyfooting around. If the governor is a good man, then let him do the right thing and not fear the consequences for noble and just actions. Go for the jugular and stop rounding up and arresting drug addicts and nickel and dime gangsters who have no history of predatory assaultive behavior and pose no significant physical threat to law-abiding citizens.

All government has to do with crime and enforcing law and the money needed to pay judges, DAs, lawyers, politicians and the law enforcement establishment, is to declare a broad amnesty and release all prisoners who have no pattern of behavior of committing violent or predatory crimes. Through careful screening and analysis, depopulate the prisons and save billions of dollars by releasing those who are incarcerated for petty and non-violent crimes and leave the prisons for those who molest children, rape women and hurt or kill, or commit any other crimes of force and violence. This is not coddling criminals or being soft on crime, but really using these prisons for what they were built for — the criminally violent!

Mr. Governor, crime does pay those who profit from it. They are not petty hoodlums and zombied-out drug addicts who are reaping the billions of dollars for maintaining the business of banks and government that all revolves around crime and enforcing law.

Incidentally, the governor should know that the United States Supreme Court is on record as stating that the "proceeds from crime are taxable." You know what that means, don't you? Crime is legitimate in America if you pay your tax on what you stole. Now I know why gangsters call themselves businessmen.

You want to do something real and radical, Mr. Governor? Just do what is right! Don't be anyone's pawn, shill, dupe or puppet. Act for the people's benefit and don't be frightened of risking and jeopardizing your life for acting from principle, from doing what is legal and ethical. And know for certain that you are not doing anything real or radical to change this world and to make it a better place to live, unless someone is trying to hurt and kill you for doing the right thing. As the good man you are representing yourself to be, let it be seen by your actions and not your talk that you are a harbinger of life and moral civilization.

Here is a brief ten point political program for moral and economic recovery:

Declare a moratorium on prison construction.

Stop executing human beings created in God's image. All life is sacred.

Abolish the billion dollar parole/probation agencies. They do nothing significant to deter or reduce crime. It is practically impossible to really monitor parolees.

Stop borrowing money from banks and loan companies. It is impossible to borrow oneself out of debt.

Instead of the bond measure, tell the truth about the economy and declare a state of emergency by filing for bankruptcy and refuse to pay the creditors (who are filthy rich) until legal tender is restored. The creditors stand to lose nothing by defaulting on the loans made to the state. Remember the Boston Tea Party.

Call for a referendum for the people to bring back the gold and silver standard so that our money, stocks and bonds can be worth their weight in gold and silver.

Who alone has the right to coin and issue money and regulate its value? Standing on the supreme law of the land, you can legally seize control of the banks and make a fiat declaration of posse comitatus, and call for Congress to take back its legal power to coin and issue money. Remember, you are the governor and in office to enforce the law, unless your powers are only symbolical, petty and imaginary.

Call for the immediate release of all prisoners struck out for petty misdemeanors and non-violent crimes. The application of the three-strike law to minor offenses undermines the foundation of Western law, i.e., the enlightened idea that the punishment should fit the seriousness of the crime.

The immediate release of all children/teenagers from juvenile halls who are not in custody for violent crimes. No governor or lawful body of a ruling state can dispense justice without knowing when and who to give mercy to. Years of incarceration of children/teenagers with psychological problems only turn them into angry and hardened criminals. Juvenile halls are also for the more serious offenders, not harmless youth who commit petty crimes and mischief, to get attention from family, to feel loved and cared for.

The family is the embryo of the state. Do something to morally strengthen families and keep them together. The dissolution of the family means the end of the state.

THE POETIC PRISONER

The two poems that follow by The Beat's own, The Poetic Prisoner, seem self-contradictory. The first, "Scared For My Life," is a brutal self-analysis that finds the crippling effects of six years in prison (CYA) almost more than he can endure or overcome. Yet the second poem, "A Master Poet," proves that despite the fear of failure and returning to prison, the Poetic Prisoner transforms himself into teacher through the power of observation and experience. It may be that he sees himself "With a deteriorating will," but there is nothing about his poetry, or his dedication to it, that is deteriorating at all. It's clear: the poet thrives.

**Of course I don't wanna go back,
However what I want is not
always equivalent to how I act.**

Scared For My Life

As I sit back and observe the world
Through the eyes of a struggling parolee,
I realize I'm scared for my life
Because not even I want to know me.
All of my good friends are in and out of jail,
Yet none of them wants to spend time in a cell.
And if my freedom isn't guaranteed that means
That at any given moment, I could be sent back to hell.
But still I'm Will
With a deteriorating will.
Ignoring the fear I feel
Because maybe it'll go away if I act like it isn't real.
Obligated to stay clear
Of the people that parented me for six years.
Drowning my fears with forty ounces of beer
Because I'd rather taste liquor than the salt in my tears.
Of course I don't wanna go back,
However, what I want is not always equivalent to how I act.
I'm discovering I lack
The ability to stay on track
Because I don't react
To experiences that have the biggest impact.
On the surface I'm relaxed,
But deep inside I'm going crazy.
It's hard to shine and do the right thing at the same time
It seems as though the world is too shady.
Lately I've been crying rivers
Because there really is no hope.
For if the human race was really a race,
I'd be the slowpoke.
I'm a sixteen year old
Stuck inside a twenty-two year old body.
Plus, I'm subject to catching a whole lot of time
For being slightly naughty.
I'm doing miraculous things,
But how long will that last?
I have to catch up to the rest of the world,
But I can't run away from my past.
I'm a violent criminal
Hidden behind the façade of a stylish individual.
Yet people get uncomfortable
When I practice my own silent rituals.
My life is a Catch 22
No matter which road I take, I'll lose.
For I was never prepared to decide,
Yet I suffer the consequences for each option I choose.
I know right from wrong,
But still my nights are long.
And I try to fight the strong,
But my words can only have an effect if you listen to them
Like a song.
And any day I might be gone,
So I'm going to live each day like my last
Regardless if I'm wrong or right.
I know this is my thinking,
And that's why I'm scared for my life.

A Master Poet

I break down words
Like a pothead breaks down herb.
I give a piece of paper what it deserves,
By offering ideas that aren't often heard.
I drop piece after piece like when I release
Turds.
Give you something to observe
Like a flock full of birds.
I play with ideas
Like a child playing with sand in a playground.
I represent the things I say,
And I'll do anything to stay down.
I can bring laughter to a disaster,
Tell you about the before and after,
Make things slower when they're supposed to be faster,
And attempt to motivate the world like a pastor.
I'm a master
Poet.
Reveal flaws in my character
When others wouldn't even show it.
Sometimes I rhyme
And don't even know it.
If there was such a thing as a poetry king,
I'd be the closest.
I always have something to write about
Because my life is its own feature film.
I try to give lessons through my words,
So I'm living in a teacher's realm.
I'm at the helm of a life-long movement,
Yet I leave room for improvement.
I let the world grasp me like music,
Then brag about how I survived through it.
For I'll live this life to the fullest
Even though I didn't choose it.
If there was a language for the heart,
I think I'd be the most fluent.
Words create my pieces,
But my life is the actual puzzle.
You can silence me if you want to,
For I can still write when I'm wearing a muzzle.
And whether I'm in or out
Of trouble,
I pick up a pen and float away
Like a bubble.
Each space has its own meaning,
But I make them work together when they're convening.
So you have to pay attention,
The things I say may seem misleading.
I grow by feeding
Off of my own flaws.
Everything you say is artificial,
What I speak is raw.
This is not for a chosen few,
But for all.
I write with my paws what I'd say with my jaws
Because I wouldn't want my poetic presence
To wet your drawe's.
My ideas are contagious,
Even when they're outrageous.
I'm trying to fill these pages
With struggles that have made me courageous.
Hopefully it's appreciated,
For this is my vulnerable side and I don't have to show it.
But I do while making it through like I've got nothing to lose,
That's what makes me a master poet.

HALLE TILLERY

Halle Tillery aka Rockstar writes us some beautiful love poetry once again from an adult facility in Milpitas, CA. Luckily he's gotten some good news about his release date, but we're not going to pinpoint it here — we don't want to jinx him. Halle used to write from San Francisco's Juvenile Hall.

**Sometimes
I close my
eyes just to
see the light**

That Someone Is Me

Someone is very proud of you
Someone is thinking of you
Someone misses you very much
Someone misses his bootie very much
Someone wants to be with you forever,
till death do us part
Someone hopes you don't run or get into any trouble
Someone is thankful for the luv
and support you have provided
Someone hopes everything turns out perfect between us
Someone, no matter what, wants you to be happy,
no matter what
Someone thinks you're the most perfect gift
anyone could receive
Someone wants to give you a gift you'll never forget
Someone's gon' love you no matter what,
Though thick and thin, eternally
Someone admires your power and strength
Someone is thinking of yo' unique smile every day
Someone is happy you're his shoulder to cry on
I am someone who will do anything for you
Someone wants to be forgiven
Someone is grateful fo' yo' forgiveness
Someone treasures your love yo' and spirit in my heart
Someone wishes he could share his laughs
and cries with you
Someone will never forget you
and wishes he was in LA with you
Someone needs to know that your love fo' him is always
gon' be unconditional
Someone wants to tell you how much
he cares about you
Someone wants to share his dreams with you
Someone counts his blessings for your friendship
and love
Somebody can't wait to see you
Somebody loves you for who you are
Someone loves the way you make him feel
Someone is alive because of you
Someone misses yo' advice and guidance
Someone has a lot of faith in you
Someone trusts you
Someone needs yo' support
Someone will cry when they read this, you
Someone hears a song that remind them of you
That someone, baby, is me
I love you Mercedes Tillery

Sadly In Love

Sometimes I be on the verge of crying when the thought of you passes
Even though I know I should cherish the moments we had,
The tenderness of yo' touch against my face send chills down ma spine
Until yo' lips I taste like sweet oak vines.
You're an emotional rose out of a passionate garden
who blooms only to express yo' feelings.
Sometimes I close my eyes just to see the light,
like everything gon' be all right
But the truth whips my ass back into reality,
Suckin' me out of the matrix of romance, while I'm telling myself this is wrong.
"Damn," I wish my thoughts could come true,
So I wouldn't have to wish and imagine
'Cause ma imaginary has become
ma enemy and ma brain is the bully
And my control over it has turned against me,
So that makes me helpless, or may I say, hopeless
You were what I fiend for and now I'm dopeless
My addiction is gone and ma heart,
Yes, ma heart can no longer accept the vein that numbs
the pain
Because it's not the same when I speak yo' name.
So call me insane,
No, better yet, call me sadly in love with you, ma wife,
Sadies

**Someone is alive
because of you**

Thank You

When our lips touched, it showed me the future
To where I will be with you, the love of ma' life,
Looking in yo' eyes as your silk-like hair
blows in the wind
Girl, I look at you as the element
that turned this boy to a man.
My heart is in yo' hands, but you're also in ma heart,
So the maze can never end
Once it starts, it's like joy
Yes, joy, like a boy with his first toy
Eyes getting moist 'cause you're the truth to my love
And it damn near makes me wanna cry
But . . . why? 'Cause God made it this way
Or is it more than that?
It's like when one states an opinion,
It becomes more than facts.
You see, I go by the eyes,
Like when I'm kissin' you and our passionate love-
making have you reach fo' the sky.
I can tell by that moment, I'm more than yo' guy
And we can feel the emotions,
So there's no disguise, love
I've made you a factor in ma life,
And it's like the more we kiss,
the faster I want you to be my wife
The days you took care of me,
And the days you came through,
You turned my gray days blue
So what I'm really trying to say is thank you.

NEIL BUTLER

It's a pleasure to have the voice of Neil Butler back in our pages, and although he is now back in the office, these pieces were written from the CYA's Chad. As you will see from the following pieces, he feels he's learned what he needs to know this time 'round. Make education a priority — self-knowledge and book knowledge. We've known Neil for a long, long time, as a powerful writer and reader in San Francisco's Youth Guidance Center, and more recently, as a colleague. We look forward to hearing more from him soon.

Was That You?

Was that you I saw long ago
In a place called Juvenile Hall?
Was that you who wrote in the Beat Within
To police the stress you caused?
Was that you that ran the streets, North Beach,
Mission Street, Tenderloin?
Was that you who knew about all the wrong things,
That you and me were doing?
Was that you who later on in life
Ended up in CYA?
Was that you sitting inside that cell
As a result of playing the game?
Was that you who wrote me then
When I longed so bad for mail?
Was that you that yelled the day you got out
That you'll never come back to jail?
Was that you who lied to me,
By saying everything's just fine?
Was that you that kept your sanity
When board gave you more time?
Was that you who said you don't understand,
What it's like in here?
Was that you staring back at me
As I looked within the mirror?
That was you who lived my life
While doing everything I do!
That was you who then stood by me
Because in reality I'm you . . .

I Had No Idea

Before I learned how to learn, I was lost in my own world of denial, defiance, and ignorance. I had no idea of who, what, or how people were supposed to live, think, look, talk, and walk. I had been totally unaware of my own behavioral problems and the circumstances that my actions had placed me in. I had lived at the bottom of the bottom, and seen nothing but dark hatred through my eyes and felt cold blood racing through my heart. I even chose to put a foggy cloud on to cover my mental thoughts.

Given the cold, cruel, and corrupt world to live in already, I had made this my permanent excuse for who I was and who I'd become. And I chose to run with this, "I don't give a damn" attitude only to satisfy my comfort zone. Eventually, the outlines of my self-destructive behavior began to show, and the results of it had landed me in some pretty tough spots to get out of. My attitude had started to affect my ability to maneuver through society without looking over my shoulder. I'd wasted more than half my life to the judicial system, which did nothing more than encourage my criminal thinking mentality.

But only then did my learnings start to become useful to me. I had gotten the "sick and tired of being sick and tired" syndrome. So I made an attempt to apply the good that I had learned, combined with the bad that I have experienced, and used it for my own self-good. And one-hell-of-a-person I have become. I had no idea what I really wanted in life until I took some time out to use my learning techniques. I had no idea which way to go or how to start working on myself, until I wrote this.

BILLY

The following pieces are from Billy aka Chino, who used to be a Beat participant in Santa Clara County's Juvenile Hall. We're happy to be adding his voice to The Beat Without section of The Beat Within, and we hope to hear more as he learns and grows wiser in his placement in Yerington, Nevada.

I'm Trapped

Hey, what's happening Beat?
I'm back to 'tack my Beats, kick tha' door, and ready to bust.
I'm trapped in a maze.
It seems like there's no way out.
Now, I heard from a little bird that my next life is death.
I happen to be paranoid and stress,
So I pack a strap right beside me
Homie, you know where to find me
How can I be a G if you wish to kill me?
Before I pull the trigger, tears are fallin' from my eyes. At night, I have happy dreams
that I'm six feet deep.
My soul is not in peace, so I still roll the streets.
It's like there's no way out, just one way in.
Life on the streets will have you dead or locked up in the pen', you feel me?
Dawg, here I sit,
Here I sit shedding tears.
People out there are shedding tears and having crazy fears.
Hey dawg, I need your help.
It's been so lonely, lonely in this place, all by myself.
I'm trapped in a maze
No, there ain't no way out,
But there's just one in . . .
Straight flows from the top of my dome
For all my dawgs locked up, one luv.

Life
on the
streets
will have
you dead
or locked
up in the
pen'

MATT MELAMED

Well, well, our good friend and colleague Matt Melamed steps up and delivers a wonderful letter to us Beat readers from a café in Berlin, Germany. We do not have much to say about this except that Matt is a wonderful colleague who has been doing great stuff for us these past three years, and this week he steps up with this letter which will speak for it self. Yeah, sure, Matt may be in one of your workshops this week, back from holiday, but never the less, his letter is better late than never!

A Letter From Berlin

I am sitting in a café. A woman sitting by an open window, the window tall as a door and twice as wide, smokes a cigarette in her right hand while noiselessly typing numbers into her mobile phone with the left. A couple at a low table to her left sits in mismatched upholstered chairs; he rolls a cigarette and lights it with legs crossed to match her pose. Tables are few, and they, along with all the furniture here, are second-hand — purchases from estate sales or resale shops that have been placed together in a way which allows them to combine their separate pasts on the concrete floor to define a room. There are tall white candles spread out on available surfaces, softly augmenting the 5-watt bulbs providing a warm half-light that makes the interior space seem a continuation of the outside, overcast dusk.

I have been working at The Beat Within for nearly three years. Most of you do not know me, but I am familiar with many of you through your writing and through the stories we share with one another back at the office (as Jack Jacqua would say, but with a slightly different meaning, "I don't know you, but I know you."). I am currently in Berlin, Germany, taking advantage of a series of unlikely and individually amazing opportunities — a friend's wedding in Italy, a family vacation, and a friend on a year-long fellowship here — that have enabled me to take an incredible five-week vacation.

Prior to my leaving San Francisco, David Inocencio, the co-founder and director of The Beat Within, asked me to write a piece for The Beat Without, and I looked forward to the opportunity. Now that I am finally sitting down to write, nearly four weeks into my vacation, it is with a deeper appreciation of the efforts each of you who write for The Beat make when you put pencil to paper. I like writing — I sometimes begin to think that I am good at it — but I have struggled to organize the thoughts that I wish to share with you. It is a daunting task, made even more so given the number of people who read this publication each week, and the reality that I have been able to hide behind the curtain as one of the many wizards of Oz that put The Beat together. It is scary to leave the safety of the hidden. Further, I am accustomed to being the listener, reading and editing and commenting on the pieces you all write; now that I have to write something of my own, I feel pressure under the weight.

It is difficult to try to describe my impressions of Berlin. Those of you who have received my letters or have listened to one of my rambling workshop introductions know that words often use me instead of me using them, and that they flow in ways that I don't have the skill to control. It is too much to hope for more than jumbled images from my descriptions; my hope is that in this jumble, some of the feel of Berlin, and of being abroad, clings like pollen to the legs of the bee, planting thoughts, curiosities, questions, impressions on your minds.

Berlin is a huge city — a city that has stretched its arms high overhead and put them around the surrounding towns until its fingers brush against the forests, grasses and crops of the countryside. It was not founded as a single city, but rather as a series of separate towns that over time merged to become a single entity. As a result, it is without a center, a single downtown; rather, there are a number small centers throughout the city.

Berlin has also born the brunt of the last few hundred years of German (and European, and world) history. Instead of looking back at time past and seeing a single trajectory towards the present, time has treated Berlin like Frankenstein. It has been ripped apart and patched back together by politics — it has been the capital of the Prussian Empire, the Weimar Republic, the Nazis, and the current reunified Germany all over the last 100 years, with a 40-year period as the epicenter of the Cold War thrown in for good measure. It has also been physically ripped apart by the bombs of World War II and the scar of the Berlin Wall that made an island of one city inside of an enemy country. The scar has taken on a different form now that the wall is down, but it continues to inform Berlin's personality.

It is these two most recent historical passions that have played themselves out on Berlin's stage that seem to have

most influenced the people who now live here. There is self-awareness to past and present intolerance and dialogue about racism and xenophobia is public and continuous. Berliners have had to reckon with a recent past that features the killing of Jews (there were 160,000 Jews in Berlin alone before the Nazis; now, there are 10,000) and the hatred of people based on religion, race, and belief — many have said that this constant reckoning, this requirement to look in the mirror and see the evil in one's own actions, is what enables them to deal with race, nationality, religion and belief so much better than it seems we Americans are able to do.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, and the subsequent fall of the Communist Block in the late 1980s and early 1990s, have influenced the city from within and without. The city could come together again, and the hipsters have streamed to the former east (Communist) side of the city clinging to the former no-man's lands near the wall. At the same time, immigrants from East Germany (including those who lived on the other side of the split city), along with other former Communist countries such as Poland and Russia, have streamed west to Berlin in search of jobs. They have been joined more recently by a huge number of Turkish and other Arab immigrants, and the result is a city that has the energy associated of something still yet to come — immigrants seeking a foothold and giving their culture and personality to the city, while Berliners themselves act as immigrants in their own city, moving east and west and making the city new again.

During my time here, I have done a little work that is related to the work we do at The Beat Within. I am working with an organization in Berlin called the Archiv der Jugendkulturen, which translates as the Archive of Youth Culture, and similar to Pacific News Service (the parent organization of The Beat), the Archiv has a number of small projects under its umbrella. One of the projects is called The Jail Project, and its focus is intensive work with right-wing fascist youth (neo-Nazis, skinheads, etc.) in Germany's youth prison system. While Nazis are looked down upon in most of German society, the traumas of reunification and the terrible state of the economy have conspired with the remnants of Nazi ideas to produce youth gangs that embrace the Nazi's particular brand of racist fascism. The Jail Project works with these youth in the prison system. I have unfortunately not been able to see them at work — they work during the school year, and therefore no workshops are being conducted during my time here. Further, I speak no German, and neither I nor the trainers for The Jail Project want to put me in the position of a visitor simply staring, uncomprehending, at the animals in the zoo.

I have, however, had the opportunity to visit one youth prison in the state of Sachsen Anhalt, touring it and talking with its warden; talk with a member of the state of Brandenburg's Ministry of Justice, the organization that oversees the justice system (juvenile and adult) in its state; and have a series of casual conversations with some of the people who work with The Jail Project. My curiosity has been how the juvenile justice system in Germany differs from those in the United States, particularly that of California. It is a difficult task to pursue that interest for two main reasons. One is that I have limited exposure to and knowledge of California's juvenile justice system. The knowledge that I do have, however, comes from you — the workshop participants I see every week in Santa Clara B-12 and B-8 and Hillcrest with Ms. Mortenson and Mr. Johnson; the people in the CYA, CDC, and other placements that I correspond with; the pieces I read in each week's Beat; and the colleagues with whom I work — and therefore, I feel confident that the little knowledge I have is insightful in a way that makes up for my own lack of personal experience. Second, and more difficult to overcome, is just how short and shallow my experience here has been. I have spoken to no one who has done time here, and I am barely coming to understand the German juvenile justice system and the German justice system at large. Therefore, my observations are also short and shallow, though I feel as if there are some which begin to capture the contrast in attitudes of the juvenile justice systems in California and Germany.

There is no case in Germany where a person younger than 18 can be charged as an adult

MATT MELAMED (CONT.)

continued from previous page

Some of the differences between the German juvenile justice system and California's juvenile justice system that have struck me are:

In California, a person is legally an adult at age 18. However, when a youth as young as 14 has committed a "serious" crime, we allow the DA (due to Proposition 21) or a judge (via 707 hearings) to decide whether to try that youth as an adult. In Germany the age of legal adulthood is 18 as well, but if someone between the age of 18-21 commits a crime, that person is often tried as a youth. This is the judge's decision, but it is one that is mostly informed by a court-appointed social worker who is assigned to the case. There is no case in Germany where a person younger than 18 can be charged as an adult. Instead of the flexibility of the definition of adult when it comes to crime being on the side of trying youth as adults, Germans are flexible on the other side, often trying adults as youth.

There is no equivalent to county-level juvenile halls in Germany. When a youth is charged with a crime, in nearly all circumstances he or she remains out in society until his or her court date. This leads to the problem that many of you are probably already anticipating — many youth who are charged with a crime continue to commit more crimes until their court date. If a youth is held until his or her court date, the time that he or she is held must be counted towards the time he or she is sentenced, unlike so many of you who are serving "dead time."

German citizens who are in youth prisons and are over the age of 18 (similar to many of our CYA wards), as well as German citizens in the adult prison system, have the right to vote in Germany. In the US, only two states (Maine and Vermont) allow incarcerated felons to vote, and in 13 states convicted felons are denied the right to vote for life — even after completing their sentence and conditions of parole. In California, convicted felons may vote only after they've completed their sentences and are off parole. In Germany, instead of being removed from society, inmates are encouraged to feel an even stronger tie to society by voting. As the warden of the Rassnitz Youth Prison in the state of Sachsen Anhalt told me, "They are treated as if they are part of society."

The number of programs — educational and vocational — available to inmates in German youth prisons seems to be far greater than those available to inmates of CYA. Further, they seem to be of better quality. At Rassnitz, for example, there are a series of new classrooms — I saw between 20 and 30 classrooms — that fit up to 12 students (they believe that students, especially those who have struggled previously in school, learn better in small classes). The classrooms feel like state-of-the-art high school classrooms in the US, including one that is a computer lab with new computers, and another that is an art studio, complete with easels, paints, brushes, oil sticks, and other drawing and painting equipment. The vocational programs lead towards professional certification in masonry/bricklaying, house painting, carpentry, welding, plumbing, and others, and are conducted in large, new facilities in which youth get hands-on training. One need only contrast these opportunities to the classroom cages of CYA that have recently featured in our local newspapers to get a sense of the value of educating young prisoners in the eyes of California's juvenile justice system.

The guards in German youth prisons must complete a special professional degree that includes two-and-a-half years of classes including psychology, sexuality and pedagogy (loosely meaning the practice of teaching) as well as security training. I am not sure of CYA guard eligibility requirements, but a quick glance at the CYA website makes it seem as if a high school diploma is enough if a candidate is over 21 years old and has passed a state exam for corrections officers.

In Rassnitz, youth in prison are very rarely isolated in cells, and if the decision is made to keep a youth isolated for more than three days, the warden must inform his state's Ministry of Justice. Youth may be kept isolated for a maximum of two weeks. In Rassnitz during the last year-and-a-half, only 24 youth have been placed in isolation for acts of violence, and nine in isolation for mental health reasons. The CYA doesn't publish statistics about how many prisoners it isolates, but those of you who are at all familiar with CYA will recognize the disparity between the German and Californian practices.

On the other hand, most inmates at Rassnitz, and in the youth prison in the state of Brandenburg, live in rooms by themselves. At Rassnitz, those rooms include bathrooms with doors that close. Further, youth at Rassnitz retain keys to their own rooms. They are only locked in their rooms at night, and though they are not free to roam throughout the facility during the day, they can lock their doors from the outside or the inside so no other inmates can get in (guards do retain keys for all rooms).

While numbers weren't available, levels of violence in youth prisons in Germany seem to be far lower than that experienced in CYA. Guards in German youth prisons carry no weapons (including no chemical or pepper spray) — when a fight breaks out, they are expected to mediate. Riots and melees do not seem to exist, and the warden estimates that Rassnitz, with over 400 incarcerated youth, has maybe 2 or 3 fights a week. In the youth prison in the state of Brandenburg, the number seems even lower — out of 350 youth in prison, there are maybe 10 incidents per year that are serious enough to provide grounds to consider new charges.

Finally, in a general sense, the "us versus them" attitude that is so prevalent in CYA between incarcerated youth and their keepers (guards, judges, lawyers, etc.) does not seem to exist in Germany. I haven't spoken to any former or currently incarcerated youth in Germany, so this observation needs to be read with a large grain of salt. However, it seems as if the juvenile justice system is sincere in its efforts to rehabilitate and take care of the youth in its care. The warden at Rassnitz said that the most important job guards have is to develop a relationship with the kids who are in his prison. Judy, who works with The Jail Project, said, "The prisons are not there to punish but to educate, to give youth a chance to change their behavior, and to give them the chance to live outside without committing another crime."

With all of that said, there are similarities — the recidivism rate is high in Germany (around 70% of youth prisoners commit another crime; about 45% return to prison), though not as that of CYA wards (over 90% return to prison); youth in prison in Germany tend to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds; many have "broken" families — fathers who have deserted mothers and children, or home environments where violence is common; almost all crimes committed by youth are committed under the influence (in Germany, almost always alcohol). However, though similarities exist, it seems that the differences are more informative, and they give us — and those who are subject to the system's prisons, parole conditions, and rules; who work in any way with the juvenile justice system; and Californians in general — a series of reasons to think about how and why we punish in the way that we do. (I am going to be writing a slightly longer and more formal report of my observations of the German juvenile justice system for the Archiv der Jugendkulturen. If any of you Beat readers want a copy of the report, simply mail me a short request to The Beat's address and I will be happy to send you a copy when it is done.)

I do not know how to conclude this letter. I wish I could offer a section for each of the people I know, featuring the elements of my experience here that they are most interested in. I could talk about how it has rained almost every day that I've been here, and how beautiful it is to see everyone come together under building doorways and awnings until the rain let up, and how a few days ago during a particularly heavy downpour, a handful of young kids left their shelter to jump around on the empty sidewalk and offer the falling drops a softer landing. I could talk about the falafel that has kept me going, about the cinnamon ice cream that made a sore throat well, and to those of you old enough to listen, about the calm of a pint of beer or a glass of wine late at night in a quiet, warm café. I want to describe the feeling of walking through a city not understanding any of the conversations or advertisements I encountered, being at once both of and separate from my surroundings, and communicating when necessary on a more basic, and maybe more pure, level. Maybe it is best to end by describing how late the sun's light clings to the sky, the clouds glowing from below until the clock approaches 11 each night. It is time for darkness to overtake the light of this letter. Good night.

STEVEN BERNAL

Steven Bernal is a poet and an essayist from Pelican Bay, who has submitted his work to *The Beat Without* for the first time, and we're happy to count him among our BWO writers. In "My Word/Your Reflection" and "Black And White" Bernal writes about how his ink reflects his tears, and how words must suffice in expressing himself, because he's locked inside prison and he has no other means of communicating to the outside world.

**I wasn't always a
five-digit number
destined to be
Institutionalized**

Implosive Impulsion

My impulsion's implosives
Caving me in my own diagnosis
Hypnosis couldn't cope with
Put me to sleep
But induce the dosage
In exposed cord high voltage
I'm coasting in slow motion
But I'm quick in my eye
I'm supposing my ghost
Screaming to let go
But I'm holding to witness
The effects of my show
My own experiment
My spirit takes a backseat
When I'm steering it
I'm delirious, furious
How I curve these angles in beside myself
So myself I'll strangle
And breathe at the same time
Watch my hand do the deed
But it wasn't mine
It's a split persona
An angel breaking free
And one already a goner
And they merge something like nuclear fusion
Kinetical mind, material body
Polluting young minds in the system
Transform this conformed ideology
With written individualism
You don't got to follow me
My steps in this system's pollution
By foreign strands of change
But you got your own brain
To see if it remains
I merely drop raindrops
Beside an ocean mist
And fog in a state of osmosis
But follow this path chosen
And your impulsions
Will be implosives

Black And White

Into this junta of printed words
I pour out my heart and soul
In its reflection's depth becomes the old visage of black and white
For what feelings can letters amass?
What is the printed language
But an interpretation of information
How do you interpret endless streams of tears
From a melancholy life
In the riddle of words?
Teach me your stoic indifference to humanity
That I might remain human
Into this junta of printed words
I pour out my soul
And in its reflection
Death becomes the visage of black and white

Eyes: My Word/Your Reflection

I take the written word, bloom it like flowers
Scribe my pen to the paper, 'cause the ink gives me power
To say what I like and like what I say
In the face of adversity, words find me a way
Like a shovel digging myself out an early grave
Like a surfboard balanced, riding a wave
My reflections entice readers to see
I wasn't always a five-digit number destined to be
Institutionalized — there was something more to me
And in the pages' reflection, I see it again
Emotions and thoughts that I relieved through the pen
So I grasp and I hold the better part of me
And the ink, an extension of my tears, my blood, my esprit
Like the eye of the tornado, calm when it's hectic
Like a warrior and his sword, he learns to respect it
In the care of your essence, it strikes a chord in you, too
In my reflections, you see a reflection of you

**Transform this
conformed ideology
With written
individualism**

E-MONEY E-Money drops us a very thoughtful piece this week about why humans are the way they are. We suggest you read it slowly and carefully. In his piece he states that back in the day we were freer than we are today, mentally and emotionally, but because of all the materialism in this world, our mentality has become clouded and we lose track of what is really valuable. Today, too many of us allow other forces to think for us and we think we have evolved, but in reality we are regressing. With that said the following piece by the legendary E-Money is his theories in the form of a letter. And he wants us to stress they are just his theories not fact. E-Money writes us from Folsom State Prison in Represa, CA.

Dear Child of God.....

I open this letter with love, respect, happiness, and internal peace. Your struggle is the blood that circulates around my heart to make it want to pump for at least another day. You escape with me to a planet that's called heaven, and even though it seems as if my body resides in hell, my mind and spirit are uncontainable. My mind and spirit is forever fighting to exceed beyond the heights of limitations. I'm fighting to first understand freedom and then to attain it.

This is what I love about you. You give me a magical feeling that I cannot completely explain. Just like freedom, I keep on trying to figure it out, but there's no one or two words that can describe it. This feeling just like freedom is just life, and trying to explain it will take a lifetime of explanations. It has so many elevations; nature is one of them.

Nature is to step into a peaceful atmosphere with a 100% pure oxygen being provided to you in the form of "welcome" from its beautiful life giving green trees and plants - and to be given sight from the forever consistent sun to have the ability to see things in beauty in a world that feeds off of, and gets its life and colors, from the rays of the sunlight, (without the sun, the world would appear as its original color, "black", and we would all die. The sun is the tool that brings life to the world's blackness, to give you and me color). Nature is to be given a first-class trip out of the realms of this society, just by experiencing the other forms of life on this Earth, such as the bugs and animals, to see how they contribute to the nurturing of this world. Things like these are the evidence that claims nature's affiliation with freedom.

The renewal of the mind is another elevation of freedom. Like stripping grease off a pot, the renewal of the mind is stripping all of man's theoretical science form one's mind and replacing it with God's instructions for life. I guess this is what the Bible means by being born again: To have the privilege to see the world through the eyes of peace and true freedom is a gift only a very few are blessed with. If you were to take the "pri" from privilege, and add "vate" you'll have "private", and if you were to add an "L" to the rest of the "privileges," you'll have "village." The man/woman who sees the world through the eyes of peace and true freedom has been blessed to have the pri-village to live in his/her "private village" separated from the rest of the world.

The renewal of the mind is to maintain faith, loyalty, and balance, and never letting anything break you, not even an inch from that state of being is when you know you have been delivered from man's mind and thinking to an image of God.

God has faith in you because He has created you from his blood, and to have faith in you is to have faith in Him. It is Satan who will test your faith, to see where your loyalty and balance stands with God. Satan is like all those distractions on the sideline to see if they can get you to turn your head from that straight path you are walking on of loyalty and faith. He will cause you to trip and fall over and over again. He will take away someone you care about to blind your love. He will take away your legs and paralyze you to try to break your balance. (You must realize that balance isn't in the legs, but in the mind). He will try to deceive your perception to crack your faith. He will drill holes in your head and try to penetrate doubt and wonder in your mind. He will do all he can to put you back in the dark world of pain-hurt and sin. One who can suffer all this and still find a way to have honest laughter, true joy, and faith and balance is one who has been delivered to a different world unlike ours. You see, once you have found true freedom, Satan can't tell you that it doesn't exist as a way to diminish your faith. He knows the godly world that has been delivered to you from the renewal of your mind is a world that God doesn't allow him to enter. He knows that if somehow we can get the whole world to find the inner heaven in themselves, that is the day Satan will no longer be of us, but of the dead where he would rest in peace.

So you ask me, "What is our purpose in life?" To free yourself from a man-ly world to that of a God-ly world, by the renewal of your mind.

You want to know who I am, dear child of God? I'm a man who has enough courage to say I'm still fighting with temptation and it needs to change. I'm a man who keeps on stumbling off balance, but refuses to fall. I have been strong enough to grasp the light, but the darkness is just a look away. I can be your worst nightmare, but I prefer to be your friend. I can do all the things that you do, but can you do all that I do?

I'm that man who is in the middle, that is at tug-of-war with myself. I'm pulling to be free, but Satan is pulling with all he got to keep me condemned. I'm pulling to escape not only me, but also you off this "life on death-row," but Satan is very manipulative, and he got you thinking this life is OK. I'm trying to show you the pictures, but you are refusing to look. I'm trying to tell you the truth about the reality that you are living in, but you spit in my face and called me a lie. Just because you can't see it, you think it doesn't exist. I say all of this to say in the process of changing, they are going to be many evil forces that are going to try to hold you back. You must have "faith," (the substance of things hoped for, but the things you cannot see), and realize that there is a light at the other end of this dark tunnel.

Freedom is life and life is freedom. We are living in two world, but yet one. It's sort of like a mirage. The life of freedom comes through

a godly mind. You must earn your way into the crossing over into the world of peace, joy, and happiness, a world without fear, but unlimited understanding. You see, heaven and hell have no distance. Heaven is not in the sky and hell is not in the depths of the universe. Heaven and hell is only a thought away the mind spirit and soul is your heaven, as well as your hell. It's up to you to choose which one you would prefer to live in.

When I think about examples such as the step pyramids and the mathematical codes it holds, explaining life - I see a once godly people. I see a people who have accomplished their state of heaven. I see a people that we were supposed to learn from, but something happened to us. I believe these examples, (the step pyramid and other mysteries), are still a mystery to man because man isn't yet mentally and spiritually ready for it.

It's insane thinking to somehow believe we have elevated, evolved, and are better than those in the deep, deep past-in this day and age because we have a few more materialistic things than they had. What we fail to realize is that mentally and spiritually, we have diminished. They lived a life of spiritual freedom and unlimited wisdom, knowledge, and vision. We live a life of slavery and confusion. Someone may be saying, "I rather live in this day, time, and age than back then," and that's because you are part of this matrix. Your mind is run by the forces of this world. You do not think for yourself, but that of someone else. The life that you live and the power, control, joy, happiness, and freedom, you think you have is all a phantom. Everything that you do is like adding quarters to the piggy bank. Your life isn't nothing but a contribution to hearing the pig "oink" that much louder. I guess you really are what you eat, drink, and think.

It seems like jealousy has taken over the world, but when jealous came to its senses-jealousy came to quickly realize that the world was too powerful for it to control. So like any other hater, (that believes if he can't have it, nobody can), jealousy destroyed the world. Not the kind of destroyal we are most aware of, but a mental and spiritual destroyal.

When God created the Earth, He created everything in pairs. Men-woman, good-bad, hard-easy, etc., if it wasn't for struggle, we wouldn't appreciate peace and successes. If it wasn't for hard, we wouldn't know easy. Life is a struggle of the physical, mental, and spiritual. One must attain this to be delivered. The problem with the world today is we have been blinded from our source of direction. Without direction, you are confused.

We must stop trying to go into other people's minds for guidance and learn how to communicate and look into our own minds for guidance. I believe this blood of mines carries not only some of the genes form my ancestors, but also somewhere in deep-part of their intelligence, experience, wisdom, and part of their soul. Common sense has to come from somewhere right? I know this sounds far-fetched, but who is man to put limitations on thinking? What if it's possible that common sense is the silent-voice of our ancestors? I want you to think with me. I don't want you to put no limitations on both the depth and height of open-mindedness. It could be a reason why you are the color that you are, and I'm the color that I am. If everything has changed about us from our past and somehow we are disconnected, why hasn't the color of my skin changed? This is evidence that deep down in my soul, somewhere is my ancestors' wisdom-knowledge-vision-guidance-and their heavenly life within me.

Like father-like son, it is said: "The fear and courage of a man is passed onto the son. Fear is your blood and you must acquire, (challenge your fear, in the presence of courage), fear in order to alleviate it from within one's blood." These are all proof that we are simply just the mere image of God almighty. You are history, you are life, and you are your own heaven. You are unique and beautiful. Why do you wish to be like someone else when there's no one on this Earth that will ever be quite like you? No one can take you to heaven, but you, and at any give time, you are ready. It's a shame that a lot of us don't know how to escape to our inner heaven because of lack of knowledge. It takes understanding. It takes vision and love. It takes unbreakable faith and compassion. A lot of us don't attain this to its depth. Therefore, we suffer pain and hurt, fear and grief, jealousy and envy, stress, and depression. You see, your outer-self doesn't make you gorgeous! It's your inner-self that determines whether your hell is ugly, or if you shine brighter than the light the sun will ever be able to produce. Without seeing you for years, I may forget some of the features of your face, but I'll know every inch of your inner soul as I do the lines on my hand. Something like a heavenly soul that's not condemned in the realms of this world is just simply too beautiful to forget. They say angels are here to help us. True, indeed, but I refuse to believe that they are in any shape or form lower than us. I believe you become that angelic God when you find the heaven in you.

Being in prison will force one to search for outlets into the world's freedom. Being in prison will force one to mentally remember and live his past all over again just to be free. Being in prison will force one to see the beauty in a world the free man, (if not a spiritually conscious being), is unable to see. This is why I say you must understand you in order to understand anything else around you. You are in your heaven and I'm in my heaven. The world revolves around you, precious! The minute that you are dead, the world no longer exists.

**You can silence me if you want to,
For I can still write when I'm
wearing a muzzle.
And whether I'm in or out
Of trouble,
I pick up a pen and float away
Like a bubble.**